*The Hardy Boys*

# THE MYSTERY of CABIN ISLAND

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

## THE HARDY BOYS

# Mystery Stories

*By* FRANKLIN W. DIXON

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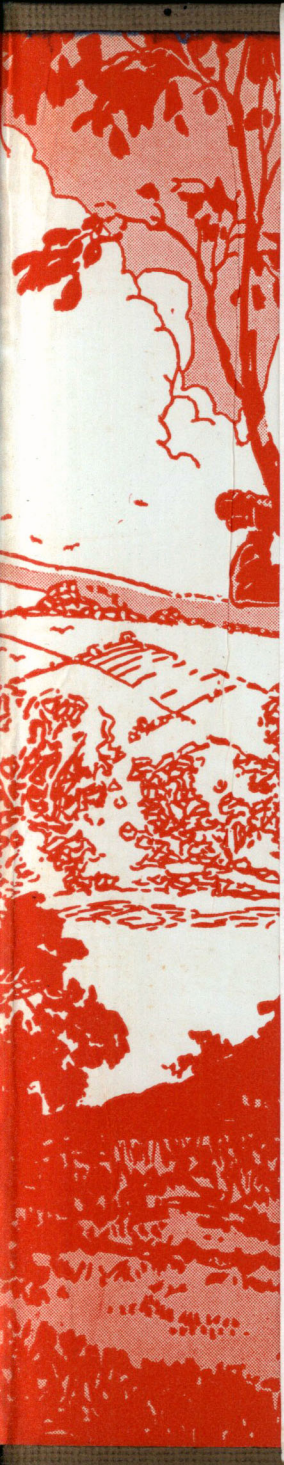

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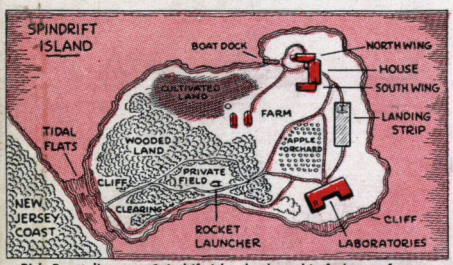
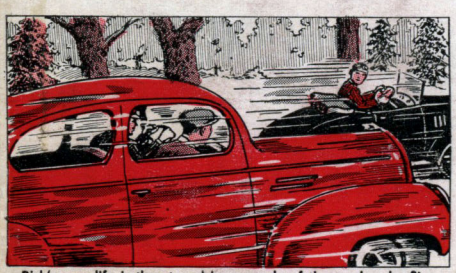
# THE ADVENTURES OF RICK BRANT

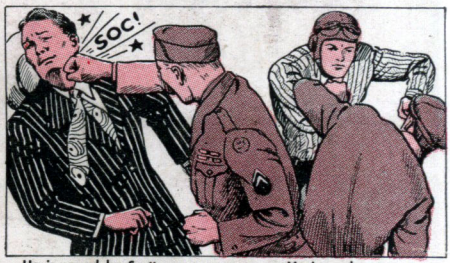



Rick Brant lives on Spindrift Island where his father, a famous scientist, is at work on an experiment to send a rocket to the moon.

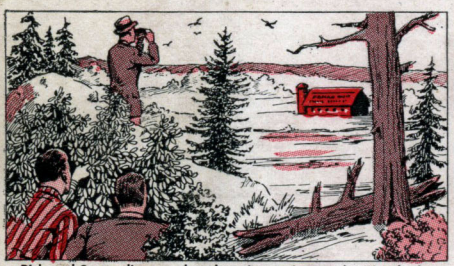
With only a week left in which to finish the experiment and win a $2,000,000 grant, the work is interrupted by strange accidents.



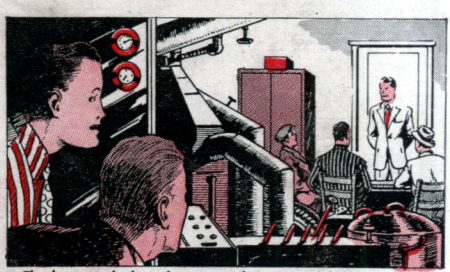
Rick's own life is threatened by a couple of thugs when he flies to the mainland to replace some vital equipment.



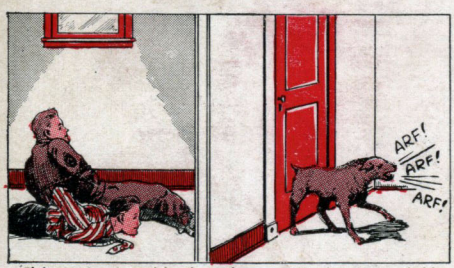

He is saved by Scotty, a courageous ex-Marine, who agrees to come to Spindrift Island and try to solve the mysterious accidents.



Rick and Scotty discover that there is a traitor on the island who receives instructions in code from a gang on the mainland.



The boys track the saboteurs to their secret laboratory. Before they can escape they are discovered by the gang.




They are imprisoned by the outlaw scientist who plans to hold them captive until he has ruined Rick's father's experiment.

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# THE MYSTERY OF CABIN ISLAND

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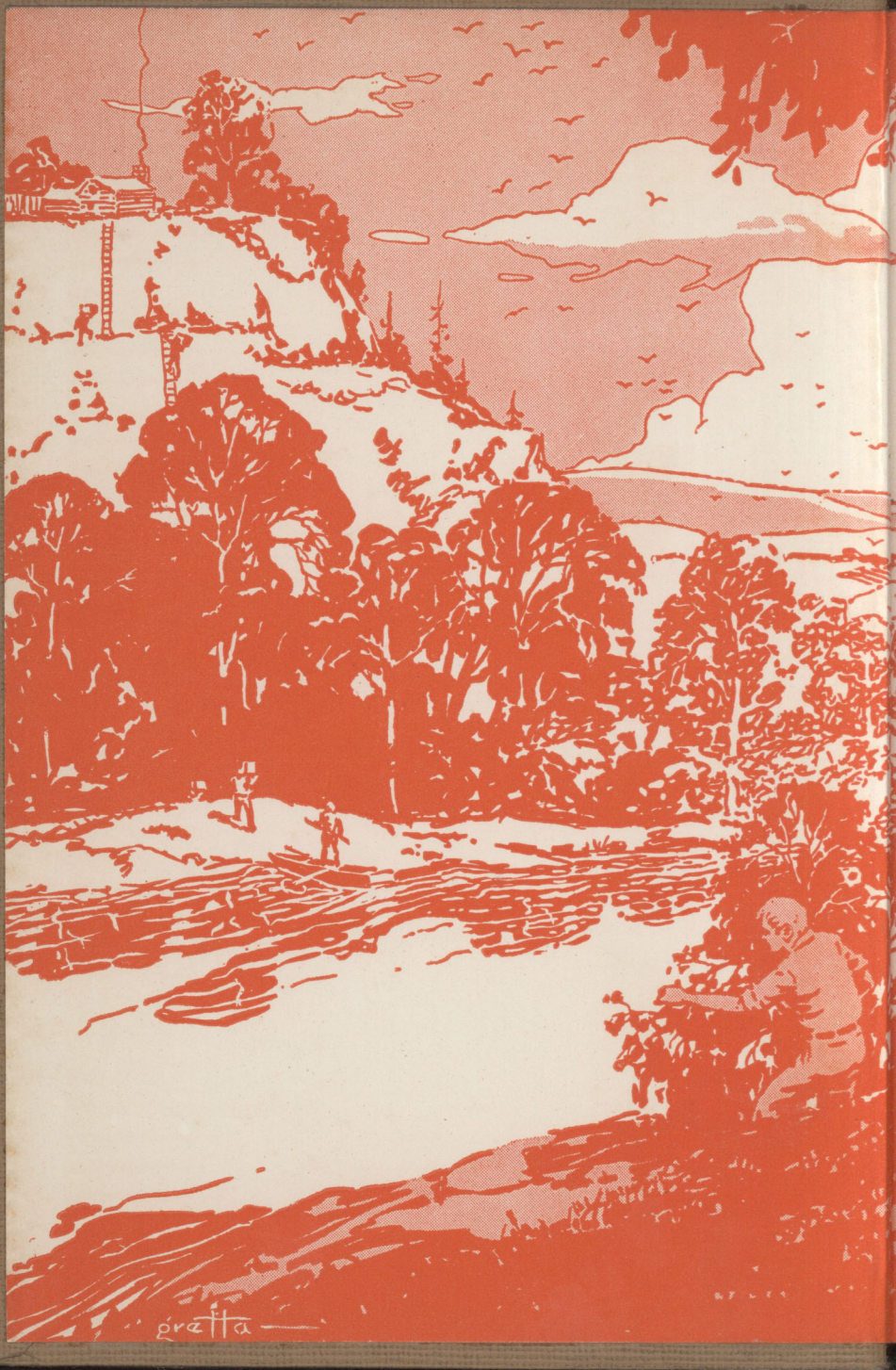
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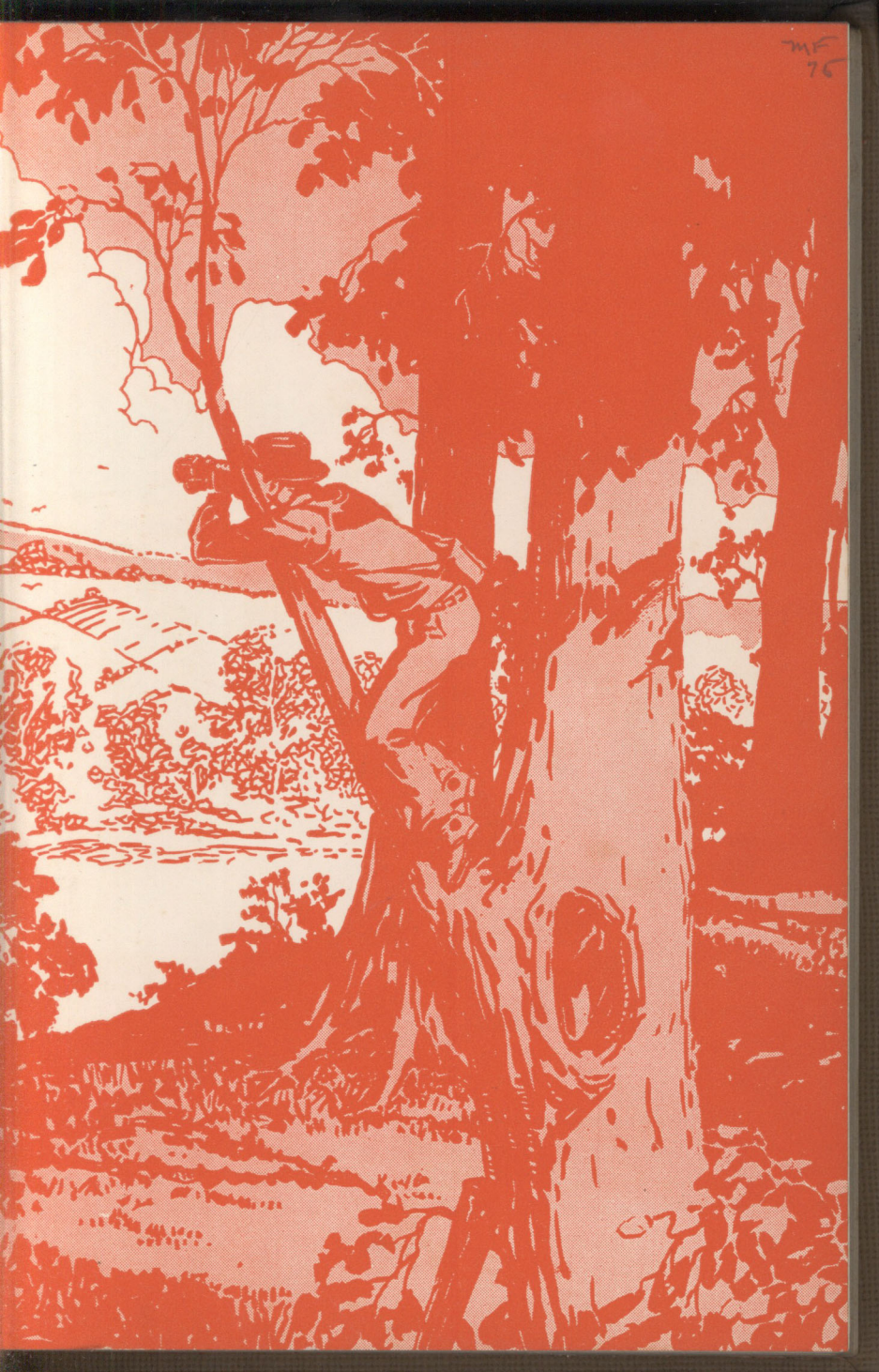

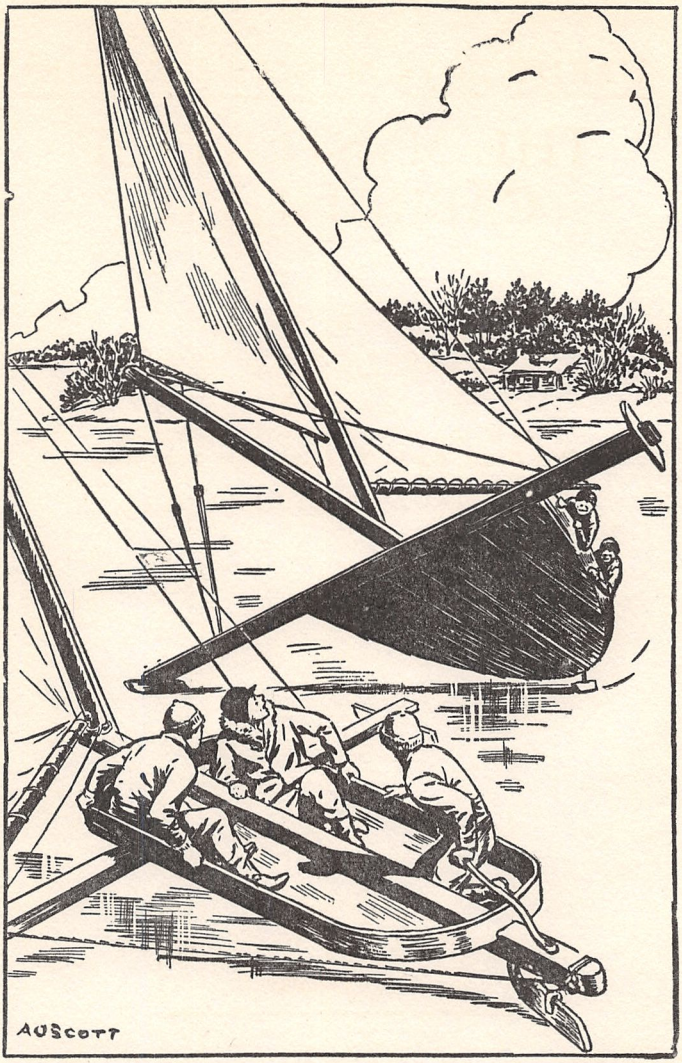


THE BIG ICE-BOAT WAS BOOMING DOWN ON THE SMALLER CRAFT AT TERRIFIC SPEED.

*The Mystery of Cabin Island*

HARDY BOYS MYSTERY STORIES

# THE MYSTERY OF CABIN ISLAND

By

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

AUTHOR OF

THE HARDY BOYS: THE TOWER TREASURE

THE HARDY BOYS: THE SECRET OF THE CAVES

NEW YORK

GROSSET & DUNLAP

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THE HARDY BOYS

# THE MYSTERY OF CABIN ISLAND

## CHAPTER I

### Ice-Boating on the Bay

Driven by a stiff breeze from the west, a trim little ice-boat went scudding over the frozen surface of Barmet Bay. The winter air was cold and clear, the hills rising from the shores were blanketed in snow, and although a patch of black water away off toward the east gave evidence that King Frost had been balked at the Atlantic, the bay itself was a gleaming sheet of ice.

The long cold snap had caused rejoicing in the hearts of the young folk of Bayport. Although the ice in mid-bay was not solid, along the shore and in the numerous coves of the indented bay it was frozen to a safe depth. The dark figures of skaters sped like swallows in flight on the miniature natural rinks close to shore, and farther out the speeding ice-boats

with their billowing sails resembled huge sea gulls as they raced before the wind.

Frank Hardy, a dark, handsome boy of sixteen, was at the tiller of the craft that represented several weeks' hard work on the part of himself and his brother Joe. Although it was homemade, the ice-boat was staunch and stoutly built and as it sped over the gleaming surface the boys were justifiably proud of their handiwork.

"This is great!" shouted Frank. "Ice-boating beats motor-boating all to pieces."

Joe, a fair, curly-haired youngster who was a year Frank's junior, was sitting forward with their chum, Chet Morton.

"I'll say it is!" he agreed. "I don't think there's a faster boat on the bay."

Chet, plump and good-natured, his round face red with cold and shining like a full moon, kicked up his heels in ecstasy and nearly went overboard as the boat swerved to avoid an ice hummock ahead.

"This is real speed!" he declared, scrambling back to safety. "No traffic cops out here, either."

"Glad to-morrow is Saturday," said Frank. "We can spend the whole day out here."

"And the holidays!" exclaimed Joe. "Don't forget the Christmas holidays. Only another week."

"I'm glad you reminded me," Chet called out. "I had clean forgotten about them."

The others laughed. In his desk at school, Chet had a small calendar, and as each day passed he carefully stroked out the date and hopefully counted the days that remained before vacation.

"What say we go camping when the holidays come?" he suggested.

"Camping!" Frank exclaimed. "Camping is for summer time."

"Just as much fun in winter. There are lots of shacks and cottages along shore. We could rent one for a couple of weeks. One with a fireplace and a stove. With lots of firewood and blankets and grub we'd be as comfortable as we could wish—and think of the fun we'd have ice-boating."

"Say, that's a mighty good idea," ventured Joe. "Sometimes you do use your head for something besides putting your hat on it. What do you think, Frank?"

"I think that Chet has had a real idea—for once in his life."

Chet grinned good-naturadely at this chaff of his comrades.

"Well, if it's a good idea, let's carry it through."

Further discussion of the proposal was interrupted just then by the appearance of two

large ice-boats racing out of one of the coves almost even with each other.

"A race!" shouted Frank. "Let's go."

He maneuvered the boat around and waited until the other boats were abreast, jockeying to get the full benefit of the wind. Then, when all three boats were on a line, they shot forward.

The boys in the other craft waved to the Hardy boys and shouted. On down the bay, over the smooth surface, sped the trio. The lad at the tiller of the biggest boat, over to the left, became excited and his craft swung around broadside. By the time he got around with the wind again his rivals had forged steadily ahead and he saw that it was almost hopeless to attempt to overtake them.

The remaining craft had an advantage over the Hardy boys' boat in that it had been constructed by a professional builder in Bayport. Its lines were trim and graceful and it had a wider spread of canvas. But the boy at the tiller found that he could not shake off the homemade boat that scudded persistently alongside.

Frank was taking advantage of every changing gust of wind. The breeze was changing and he tacked to starboard, allowing his rival a momentary burst of speed that left the Hardy boys trailing in the rear.

"Too bad!" muttered Chet. "Can't beat *that* boat."

"Just wait and see," advised Frank.

The changing breeze filled the sail and again the ice-boat sprang forward. The other craft was slowing down, and the steersman was desperately trying to bring it about with the wind again. But he was too late. The Hardy boys' boat swept triumphantly across his bow and Chet gave a shout of delight. On down the bay sped the little craft and by the time the other boat's sails were billowing again the lads were far in the lead. Looking back, they saw the beaten rival slowly turning about into the wind, heading back up the bay.

"That's real seamanship!" declared Joe.

"Oh, well, we have a good boat," returned Frank, refusing to claim any credit for the victory. "We were lucky the wind changed."

Ahead of them loomed a high, gloomy cliff, rising sheer from the ice. Beyond that, they knew, was one of the largest coves on Barmet Bay, known as Cabin Cove.

"Let's go on and take a look at Cabin Island," suggested Chet. "Seeing we're so close to the place we might as well pay it a visit."

"Sure thing," approved the others.

Cabin Island, in Cabin Cove, was a lonely spot, even more desolate now that the bay was

locked in ice. It was seldom visited, even in the summer months, because it was an inhospitable place, with high cliffs rising almost directly from the water, with only a few landing places that were difficult of access.

The Hardy boys had often wanted to visit the island in the summer, but their motorboat, the *Sleuth,* was too large to be maneuvered among the rocks that skirted the lonely shore, without running danger of being dashed to pieces by the angry waves.

"We won't have any trouble making a landing now," said Frank. "We can bring the ice-boat right up to the base of the cliffs until we find a place where it is possible to climb to the top."

The island was heavily covered with timber, and at one time it had been inhabited, for a big log cabin had been constructed on an eminence overlooking the bay. From this cabin, the island had derived its name. The cabin was deserted now, and to the boys' knowledge no one had lived there for the past five years, either in summer or winter.

The ice-boat swung around the point, the cliffs lowering bleakly overhead, and they sped down into the great cove.

Cabin Island, dark and austere, lay before them, the ice gleaming on every side. The evergreen timber rose above the white snow,

and at the southern end of the island the cabin could be plainly seen.

Within a few minutes, the ice-boat was speeding along in the lee of the island, close to the steep walls of rock. The boys eagerly scanned the cliffs in the hope of finding a landing place.

At last Frank gave a murmur of satisfaction and steered the craft toward a break in the cliff. Here there was a small ravine and against the background of snow the boys distinctly saw a path that wound up the sloping side of the ravine toward the cabin above.

"Thought there'd be a landing place here somewhere," he said.

"Queer," said Chet, eyeing the path. "Must be some one on that island."

"There are footprints, sure enough."

"It snowed three days ago. There must have been some one here since then," Joe observed.

"Probably some other chaps came out here in an ice-boat," said Frank carelessly. "If that's the case, they've been kind enough to break trail for us."

He guided the ice-boat into the little bay and its sail flapped idly as it came to a stop just a few feet from shore. The boys hopped out on to the ice and stretched their legs, then anchored the craft and made it secure. The little bay was sheltered from the wind. It was a natural harbor, and evidently the owner of the island

had built his cabin where he did because of this ideal landing place that in summer was almost hidden from view by the overhanging trees.

Frank was examining the footprints leading toward the upper level.

"Only one set of footprints here," he said. "They seem quite fresh, too. I wonder if any one is up there now."

"Must be," returned Joe. "The footprints lead up the hill, but there is none leading back."

"Perhaps he went down the other side," Chet suggested. "Well, we can't let that scare us away. Let's go."

With Frank in the lead, the boys began to ascend the winding path, following those mysterious footprints in the snow.

They were about halfway up the side of the ravine when suddenly a dark figure appeared from behind a clump of trees a few yards ahead. A surly-looking man, black-browed and swarthy, advanced toward them, striding through the snow.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded in a rasping voice.

"Just thought we'd explore the island, sir," answered Frank. "We hope you don't mind."

"I do mind!" retorted the stranger curtly. "Get away from here and stay away. I don't allow visitors."

"But——"

"No argument!" he snapped. "You're trespassing here. Get away, now. Make tracks."

"We won't damage anything," piped Chet.

"Do you hear me? Get off this island at once! Clear out, and be quick about it!"

The stranger glared at them angrily. Frank saw that nothing would be gained by arguing the matter. He shrugged.

"All right, sir."

"Thanks for the hospitality!" sang out Chet, as the boys turned about and retraced their steps down the path.

## CHAPTER II

### Heading for Trouble

"Something queer about this business," said Frank Hardy, as the three boys went back toward their ice-boat. "I don't see why he should be so anxious to keep visitors off his old island. We weren't doing any harm."

"He's a crab!" declared Chet. "Who is he, anyway?"

"I think his name is Jefferson," said Joe. "Elroy Jefferson. I've heard that he owns Cabin Island."

"Jefferson," said Frank reflectively. "I've heard that name before."

"Of course you have. He's an antique dealer. Sort of queer old codger, from all accounts. We saved his automobile for him, don't you remember?"

"Oh, now I know where I heard his name!" exclaimed Frank. "You're right. He lives in a big house up the Shore Road."

"Sure. His car was one of those stolen when the auto thieves were busy on the Shore Road. We found it in the cave when we rounded up the gang."

The incident to which Joe referred was the

climax of one of the numerous mysteries solved by the Hardy boys. The brothers, who were introduced to our readers in the first volume of this series, entitled: "The Hardy Boys: The Tower Treasure," were the sons of a celebrated American detective, Fenton Hardy by name, and had already won considerable fame for themselves in and about their home city of Bayport by reason of their success in solving a number of mysteries that had baffled the local police.

Frank and Joe, although still in high school, were anxious to follow in their father's footsteps. Fenton Hardy was a hero to them. For many years he had been connected with the detective bureau of the New York police department, where he had earned such distinction that he was able to resign and move to Bayport, there to accept cases as a private investigator. Internationally famous, he was frequently called in to solve mysteries that had been given up by the police in all parts of the country, as well as accepting other assignments in which police action was not desired.

Already the two boys showed that they had inherited much of their father's ability. They were sharp, observant and intelligent enough to draw shrewd deductions from small clues.

In the volume immediately preceding the present story, "The Hardy Boys: The Secret

of the Caves," the lads tackled a mystery that even Fenton Hardy had not been able to solve, the disappearance of an aged college professor, and had eventually found the old man after a series of thrilling adventures on a lonely part of the Atlantic coast.

"So that's Elroy Jefferson, is it?" said Frank. "Pleasant sort of customer, isn't he? He didn't treat us very well, considering we saved his automobile for him."

"Perhaps he doesn't know you," suggested Chet.

"That's possible. I remember now. He was in Europe at the time of the car-stealing affair."

"Perhaps this chap isn't Mr. Jefferson at all," put in Joe. "He may have sold the island."

"Well, whoever he is, I don't think much of him. What did he think we were going to do? Burn down his cabin?"

Chet laughed. "I guess he doesn't want his nice, pretty island all tracked up. Well, I suppose there's nothing for us but to go home. It's getting late, anyway."

The boys scrambled into the ice-boat. Before they started off, however, Frank looked back up against the lonely cabin, silhouetted at the top of the cliff against the dreary winter

sky. The man who had driven them away was nowhere in sight.

"I can't get it out of my head that there's something strange about this business," he said. "I'd like to know why he was so anxious to chase us away."

"Aw, you see a mystery in everything," scoffed Chet. "He's just a cranky old chap who likes to show his authority. I'll bet he even tries to boss the rabbits and the snowbirds on the island. Let's go!"

The ice-boat moved slowly away from Cabin Island and the boys soon forgot their disappointment in the exhilaration of swift flight across the ice.

They swept out of the cove, around the rocky point, out into the bay. Far ahead of them lay Bayport, its towers and spires shining in the sunset. It was getting colder, and the wind stung their faces to a rosy glow.

"If we go camping in the holidays!" shouted Frank, "I guess Cabin Island is off our list, at any rate."

"It would be a mighty fine place to camp," said Joe regretfully. "It's too bad Mr. Jefferson is such a crank. A good-hearted chap would let us live in his old cabin during the holidays."

"Well," remarked Chet, "this particular chap isn't at all good-hearted, so I suppose

we'll just have to hunt up another camping spot."

The boys were silent. Cabin Island would have been an ideal place for their outing. It would be difficult to find another cabin as well constructed and so near Bayport.

Suddenly, Chet pointed ahead.

"Look at that ice-boat!" he exclaimed. "Must be a crazy man steering it."

Away in the distance they could see a large craft, twisting and turning in an erratic fashion. It would speed in a straight course for a hundred yards or so, then it would commence to zigzag crazily, at times veering over until the sail was almost level with the ice.

"He'll break his mast or his rudder," opined Frank. "Then he won't be so smart, when he finds himself stranded about three miles from town. A chap who will handle a boat like that doesn't deserve to have one."

However, the other craft seemed to be standing up under the senseless strain being imposed on it. It was a larger boat than that of the Hardy boys, and it was able to withstand mishandling that would have wrecked a smaller craft.

The boys did not alter their course, for they were some distance to leeward and under ordinary circumstances would not pass within shouting distance of the big boat. However, as

they sped on, Frank saw that the other craft had ceased zigzagging and was now bearing toward them. Its huge sail was full and it was gathering speed.

"That big boat can certainly travel!" exclaimed Chet.

"I'll say it can. If he doesn't change his course that chap will travel right into us."

As the big boat drew nearer the boys saw that there were two men on board. Frank mentally checked over the various ice-boats he had seen on the bay and thought he recognized the approaching boat as belonging to Tad Carson and Ike Nash, two young men of unsavory repute in the city. They were loud-mouthed, insolent fellows who had never been known to do a day's work, and it was a mystery how they had managed to raise sufficient money to buy the ice-boat in which they were now amusing themselves.

"He'd better change his course," said Joe nervously. "He's heading right toward us."

"Not if I know it," said Frank. "If he won't change, then I will."

He bore down on the tiller and their ice-boat swung around out of the path of the other.

Then, to their amazement and consternation, the lads saw that the big craft had also swung around and that it was still hurtling forward at terrific speed.

"They're going to run us down!" shouted Chet, in alarm.

The big boat was only fifty yards away. The lads could see Ike Nash at the tiller, his mouth open in an ugly grin.

In another moment, the big craft would crash broadside into the small boat, and so great was its speed that the Hardy boys' boat would certainly be wrecked beyond repair and it was possible that the boys themselves might be seriously injured.

Then they saw Ike bear down on the tiller again, evidently trying to avert the catastrophe at the last minute. It had been a crude practical joke on his part, to frighten the lads.

Then he looked up, his face frightened, and shouted.

The tiller had not responded!

The big ice-boat did not change course. It was booming down on the smaller craft at terrific speed!

## CHAPTER III

### A Strange Note

Had it not been for Frank Hardy's coolness and presence of mind, there would have been a disastrous collision.

His quick hand at the tiller averted the crash by a hairbreadth. How he did it, he could not later explain. At the time, Chet and Joe could see no possible chance of escape. But, just as the collision seemed imminent, their craft veered off to one side and the other boat went booming past at terrific speed, the two ice-boats so close together that their sides almost touched.

It was a narrow escape. Frank had swung the nose of his boat around just in the nick of time.

He brought the craft around in a circle, for the boys were in no mind to let the affront pass. Then they saw that the other boat had overturned. The boy at the helm, frightened by the imminence of peril, had lost his nerve, had swung the boat too far over, and it had gone on its side. The mast had snapped. The boat was wrecked.

The Hardy boys and Chet Morton went back

to the scene. Tad Carson and Ike Nash were just crawling out from under their capsized craft.

"What's the big idea?" roared Nash, in an ugly humor. "Now see what you've done. You might have killed us!"

"Take some of that for yourself," rejoined Frank, walking over. "It was your own fault. You tried to run us down."

"Run you down! I like that! You head straight for us and then say we tried to run you down. You've smashed our boat, so you have, and you'll pay for it."

"Try to collect!" advised Chet airily. "By rights, we ought to have you up in court. Trying to be smart, weren't you?"

Both the other boys were bigger than Chet, but this never bothered that boy—as long as some one was with him.

"Absolutely deliberate, wasn't it, Tad?"

"You bet!" said Carson. "The young brats drove right at us. If they had hit us we might have been killed."

Their cool effrontery amazed the Hardy boys.

"You've got a lot of nerve," snapped Joe. "Trying to lay the blame on us. It serves you right to have your boat smashed up. You would have smashed ours if we hadn't been lucky. After this, watch where you're going."

"Look here!" said Ike Nash truculently, doubling his fists and stepping forward. "I won't stand talk like that from you."

"No?" said Frank, edging over to Joe's side, and doubling his fists as well. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Yes," added Chet, trying to achieve a threatening expression, "what are you going to do about it?"

Ike and Tad surveyed the three lads who stood facing them, with fists ready. Like most bullies, they were cowards, and now that their bluff had been called they were not anxious to risk a battle that might prove the worse for them.

"You'll find out what we'll do about it," growled Ike. "As for me, I wouldn't waste my time thrashing you, although you need it mighty bad——"

"Sure," agreed Tad Carson quickly. "I wouldn't lower myself to lick you. Just a pack of babies, that's all. You oughtn't to be allowed out on the bay when you can't handle a boat."

"It's your boat that got smashed," Chet reminded them cheerfully. "How was that for handling?"

"Come on," said Ike. "Don't talk to the brats, Tad. What's the use wasting time on them?"

"That's what I say," agreed his companion, and they returned loftily to their smashed boat, trying to conceal their chagrin.

"Want a ride back?" chirped Chet.

"You clear out of here, or we'll smash your boat too."

"Let's go," advised Frank. "They're in a bad humor. It wasn't our fault. I think we were lucky to escape so easily. If our boat had been smashed they would have just laughed at us."

The lads scrambled back into their ice-boat and in a few minutes they were sailing up the bay again, past the wreckage of the other craft. Ike Nash and Tad Carson were clumsily trying to put it to rights.

"That'll teach 'em to go around scaring people," observed Chet Morton virtuously, as they flashed by. He waved ironically at the marooned sportsmen, and was rewarded only by a shake of the fist from Ike Nash.

In a short time, the lads were back at Bayport, and, having placed the ice-boat in its berth, they walked up the snow-covered street toward the Hardy home. This was a fine brick residence on High Street, with a garage where the boys kept their motorcycles and the decrepit auto they had bought with their savings and which had been of so much value in solving the Shore Road mystery of the stolen automo-

biles, as recounted in the volume of that title. At the rear was a barn, which had been fitted up as a gymnasium, where the Hardy boys and their chums spent many happy hours on rainy and stormy Saturdays.

When the Hardy boys said good-bye to Chet Morton and entered the house they were greeted by Aunt Gertrude, a peppery, dictatorial lady of certain temper and uncertain years, who was again with the Hardys for a visit of indeterminate length. Aunt Gertrude could never reconcile herself to the idea that the boys were growing up and persisted in treating them as though they were still infants, or, as Joe expresed it, "as if we were half-witted."

"Go back and stamp the snow off your shoes!" she ordered, as they tramped into the hall. "It's a disgrace, the way you two boys track up this house just as soon as I've got everything all cleaned up."

There was very little snow on the boys' boots, and Aunt Gertrude never, under any circumstances, assisted in the house cleaning, but it was her nature to give orders. The boys knew better than to disobey, so they meekly returned to the vestibule and stamped their shoes, then came back into the hall.

"That's better," said their aunt grudgingly. "Now go into the library. Your father is wait-

ing for you. You should have been home hours ago. I declare I don't know where you spend your time. Just gallivanting around when you should be at home doing your studies."

The boys went on into the library. The door was open and when they entered they found their father, Fenton Hardy, the noted detective, perusing an imposing grist of legal documents at his desk. He glanced up and smiled at them.

"Hello, sons! Been out on the bay?"

"Yes, sir," returned Frank. "Out in the ice-boat."

"Good, healthy sport. Have a good time?"

"Oh, yes. We went away down as far as Cabin Island."

"Cabin Island, eh? That's strange. I've had Cabin Island in my mind for the past hour or more. There has been a message here, waiting for you."

"A message?"

Mr. Hardy reached into his desk and produced an envelope.

"A man called here this afternoon and left this message for you boys."

"But why should it remind you of Cabin Island, Dad?" asked Joe.

"Because the man who left the message here was Elroy Jefferson's chauffeur."

"Elroy Jefferson!" exclaimed Frank. "Why, he is the man who owns Cabin Island."

"So I believe. Well, there's the note, at any rate. Better read it and find out what he has to say."

Frank tore open the envelope and removed a folded slip of paper. There were a few typewritten words. He and Joe read them with growing amazement.

"Well, what do you know about that?" exclaimed Frank finally.

"I wonder what's the idea?" said his brother.

Frank handed the note over to their father.

"What do you make of it, Dad?"

Fenton Hardy read the note. He looked puzzled. Then he handed it back to the boys.

"I can't say, I'm sure," he said. "It's a strange note. Still, I suppose you had better do as he asks, and then you'll know more about it later."

"We certainly will!" said Frank.

Then he read the note over again.

## CHAPTER IV

### Holiday Plans

The note which puzzled the Hardy boys was as follows:

"Messrs. Frank and Joseph Hardy,
"Bayport.
"Dear Sirs:

"If it is convenient for you to call upon me at my residence to-morrow I should like to talk to you about a matter that has been in my mind since my return from Europe. If you will be good enough to call early to-morrow afternoon I will explain further.

"Yours very truly,
"Elroy Jefferson."

"A matter that has been in his mind ever since his return from Europe," said Frank. "I wonder what it can be."

"Well, we recovered his automobile for him from the Shore Road thieves," ventured Joe.

"What has that to do with it?" asked Fenton Hardy, smiling.

"Mr. Jefferson wasn't in Bayport at the time. You remember, we got a big reward for clearing up that case and the owners of the stolen cars contributed to it. But as Mr. Jef-

ferson was away, he wasn't in on that. Perhaps he wants to add to it," said Joe hopefully.

Fenton Hardy shook his head in amusement.

"I thought you did very well. Surely you aren't looking for more money."

"Oh, we're not *looking* for more. Still, if Mr. Jefferson feels hurt because he couldn't show his appreciation, why, we wouldn't turn down any offer," and Joe grinned.

"I don't know Mr. Jefferson," said Frank. "What's he like, Dad?"

"He is an antique dealer," returned Mr. Hardy. "He is quite well known in his own field. He travels in Europe a great deal, buying antiques. Of late years he has kept very much to himself. I believe he has made a great deal of money, and in his time he was one of the leading experts in antique furniture in the country."

"Isn't he still an expert?"

"Oh, yes. But he isn't as prominent as he once was. Something happened to him a few years ago that made the old fellow very queer. I don't remember exactly what it was; but since that time he has been something of a character."

"Sounds interesting," commented Joe. "Well, I guess we'd better go and see him tomorrow, hadn't we, Frank?"

"Sure thing. We can ask him why he keeps

such a tough-looking watchman on Cabin Island."

"A watchman?" exclaimed Fenton Hardy.

"Yes. We landed there this afternoon and a man told us to clear out. Said we were trespassing."

"That doesn't sound like Elroy Jefferson," said Mr. Hardy. "I'm sure he wouldn't give any such orders. As far as I remember him, he has always been a rather kindly old chap."

"We thought perhaps he had sold the island."

"I haven't heard of its changing hands. I can't imagine why he would have a watchman there in the winter, anyway. Ask him about it when you see him to-morrow."

The next morning, although the boys had discussed the note from Mr. Jefferson many times, they had still failed to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion as to the reason why he should want them to call on him; so they were awaiting the interview with curiosity and expectation.

That morning, while on an errand downtown for their mother, the brothers met Callie Shaw and Iola Morton. Both girls attended the Bayport high school and were in the same grade as the Hardy boys. Callie, a brown-eyed, brown-haired girl, was Frank's particular favorite among the girls at school, while Iola, plump and

dark, Chet Morton's sister, was the only girl who had ever won even a reluctant admiration from the bashful Joe, who had even gone so far as to admit that she was "all right—as a girl." Which, from Joe, was high praise.

"Well, it's good to see you alive!" exclaimed Callie. "From what we've been hearing, it's lucky you're able to come downtown at all today."

"Yes," chimed in Iola, "Chet has been telling me all about it. I should think you'd have been patting yourself on the back ever since."

The boys looked at one another blankly.

"What yarn has Chet been springing now?" asked Frank.

"No yarn. He was telling us how narrowly you all escaped being killed out on the bay yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, that!" laughed Frank. "It wasn't so bad. We might have got bumped about a bit, but we were lucky."

"That's letting *you* tell it!" exclaimed Iola. "Chet says that if it hadn't been for the way you handled that ice-boat, Frank, there would have been a terrible smash-up."

"Oh, Chet usually exaggerates," said Frank uncomfortably.

"You're too modest," put in Callie quickly. "He told us all about it. I think you deserve a lot of credit, Frank."

"You bet he does!" cried Joe warmly, oblivious of his brother's embarrassment. "He saved our lives."

"And as for those other boys!" continued Callie. "If that Ike Nash or Tad Carson ever dare speak to me again I'll go past them with my nose in the air. Won't you, Iola?"

"I certainly will. And I'm going to tell the other girls about it, too. I think it was mean of them, and I'm glad their old boat got smashed."

"Oh, I guess they've suffered enough," said Frank. "No use rubbing it in."

"If they had smashed your boat they would have told the story all over Bayport. I'm certainly glad it turned out the way it did," said Callie.

"Drat that Chet," muttered Frank, after the girls had gone on down the street. "Why can't he keep quiet? He'll be making me out a hero if he keeps up. I didn't want anything said about that affair."

"Well, only two girls know about it now," returned Joe, comfortingly.

*Only* two girls!" snorted Frank. "He might as well have published it in the newspaper."

Nevertheless he was inwardly pleased by Callie's evident concern over his narrow escape and by her admiration of the way he had acquitted himself in the emergency.

That afternoon, immediately after lunch, the Hardy boys set out for the handsome Jefferson home on the Shore Road. The place was not far away, and as the snow was too deep to permit of using their motorcycles, the boys went on foot. Before they had come within sight of the place they met a chum, Biff Hooper, who frequently accompanied the Hardy boys on their adventures.

They found Biff, who was pugilistically inclined, dancing about in the snow, making wild dashes and lunges at an imaginary sparring partner. He did not see Frank and Joe at first and when they came up to him he had evidently just put the finishing touches to the invisible antagonist, for he was breathing heavily and, as he looked down into the snow, he was counting! "Seven—eight—nine—ten—Out!"

"Hurrah for the new champion!" shouted Joe. "Did you knock him out, Biff?"

Biff swung around quickly and looked very foolish.

"Just doing a little shadow-boxing," he explained, very red in the face. "I didn't hear you coming."

"Practising to clean up on the championship?" asked Frank pleasantly. "Whoever he was, you knocked him right off the map."

"Say," said Biff, anxious to change the subject, "I've been wanting to see you fellows."

"Looking for a fight?" asked Joe. "Sorry, but we've decided not to do any fighting until after Christmas because Santa Claus mightn't like it and then he wouldn't put anything in our stockings. You want to be careful, Biff. If Santa hears you've been shadow-boxing out in the main road you mightn't get any lollipops on Christmas Eve."

"Aw, dry up," grumbled Biff. "I've been wanting to see you—no kidding."

"What about?"

"What are you going to do in the Christmas holidays?"

"Don't know," replied Frank. "We haven't made any plans yet. I guess we'll just hang around town. We've got the ice-boat, and there'll be some skating."

"How about an outing of some kind? I've had that in my mind for the past two or three days. Don't you think we could all get away somewhere and go camping."

"Sounds good," approved Joe. "Where shall we camp?"

"I don't know. I thought you chaps could look after that end of it."

"It isn't so easy to go camping in winter. In summer there are lots of places."

"Well, think it over," said Biff. "If you think of a good place and decide to go, be sure and let me know. I'd like to be in on it."

"Sure thing. We wouldn't leave you out, Biff."

"If we could get away right after school closes we could have a good long holiday in camp."

"How about Christmas?" inquired Joe doubtfully. "We shouldn't want to miss Christmas, should we?"

"Worrying about your presents?"

"I'd hate to miss them."

"Maybe we could get them before we went."

"In that case," said Joe, relieved, "I wouldn't care when we went to camp."

"Well, think it over." Biff made a vicious left swing at his imaginary sparring partner. "Be sure and let me know."

Then he chased the invisible enemy down the road and was soon lost to sight around the bend.

"He's going to miss one of those wild swings of his some day and knock himself out," prophesied Joe. "I never did see a fellow so crazy about boxing."

"He's good at it. Still, that's not a bad idea he has about camping during the Christmas holidays. We'll talk it over with Chet."

"Sure."

The boys went on and in a short time they came to the Jefferson house. It was a large, gloomy mansion, set back some distance from the road, and when the boys went up the walk,

which had been swept and shoveled clear of snow, it was with a quickening sense of anticipation.

They rang the bell.

"We'll soon know what Mr. Jefferson wants to see us about," said Frank.

The door opened.

The housekeeper, a prim, angular woman, regarded them silently for a moment.

"Mr. Jefferson asked us to call," explained Frank.

"He is expecting you," said the woman. "You will please come in."

They stepped into a gloomy hall and the housekeeper ushered them toward a reception room.

"Please be good enough to wait," she said stiffly. "Mr. Jefferson is engaged at present."

Then she went away, her skirts swishing.

Frank and Joe Hardy sat uncomfortably on the extreme edges of their chairs and looked at the enormous family portraits on the walls. They could hear voices from a living room beyond. At first they could not distinguish anything that was being said—not that they listened—there being a mere hum of conversation, but suddenly one of the men in the next room raised his voice, sharply:

"I don't see why you won't sell, Mr. Jefferson! I offer a good price."

It was evident that the speaker was angry and perturbed.

Then, in another voice, also raised, came the reply:

"The island is not for sale at any price, Mr. Hanleigh, and that settles it."

This, presumably was Elroy Jefferson, the antique dealer. The other man expostulated.

"But you know very well I'm offering more money than——"

"I do not care to discuss it!" returned Mr. Jefferson. "The island is not for sale. That's final! No! No! I don't care to talk about it any more. You are only wasting your time. Good-day to you, sir."

## CHAPTER V

### Mr. Hanleigh

The Hardy boys heard the door of the living room open and saw two figures pass out into the hall. A moment later the front door closed with a bang. There were footsteps, and then a small, kindly, gray-haired gentleman stood in the entrance of the reception room.

Frank and Joe, in the meantime, were looking at one another in astonishment. They had recognized the voice of Mr. Jefferson's caller, and they had recognized the man himself as he passed in the hall. It was none other than the man who had ordered them away from Cabin Island!

Elroy Jefferson was advancing toward them, his hand outstretched.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting, boys. You are Fenton Hardy's sons, I presume. Well, well. I'm glad to make your acquaintance I didn't mean to make you wait, but my caller seemed insistent." He seemed rather disturbed and glanced back toward the door, shaking his head. "That fool can't take no for an answer," he muttered.

Then, smiling, he turned toward the boys again.

"I asked you to call here this morning because I wanted to thank you for getting my Pierce-Arrow back for me. I was traveling in Europe at the time and I didn't know anything about the affair until I came back. I'm afraid you must have thought me very ungrateful."

"Not at all, sir," said the boys politely.

"Well, if I had been here at the time you may be sure I would have expressed my appreciation at once. However, better late than never. I was away when the Automobile Club passed the hat for that reward."

Elroy Jefferson referred to a reward which had been subscribed by various owners of cars which the Hardy boys had recovered from the Shore Road thieves.

"That's all right, sir," said Frank. "We weren't looking for any reward."

"I know. I know. But you deserved one. And, if you will allow me, I should like to give you a reward of my own."

With that, he produced a wallet from his pocket and withdrew two crisp, new bills which he handed to the boys. The lads glanced at the money with surprise, for Elroy Jefferson had handed each a hundred-dollar bill.

"Oh, we can't take this, Mr. Jefferson," protested Joe. "We've been very handsomely

rewarded already, much more than we deserved——"

"I want you to take this money. My car was not insured and was worth a great deal more than that to me, and if it hadn't been for you two boys I would have lost it."

The boys protested, but Elroy Jefferson insisted, and finally they were forced to accept the reward.

"Now," said Mr. Jefferson, "if there is anything else I can do for you at any time, don't hesitate to ask me."

The boys looked at one another.

"There is something we'd like to ask you," hesitated Frank. "That is, if we're not intruding——"

"What is it?" asked the antique dealer agreeably.

"It's about the man who just left here."

"Hanleigh? What about him?"

"If you don't object to the question—does Mr. Hanleigh own Cabin Island?"

Mr. Jefferson shook his head.

"Certainly not. Why do you ask?"

Frank then told him about the adventure of the previous day, and related how Hanleigh had driven the three boys away from the island.

"We thought it was strange at the time, for we didn't think that the island had changed hands. Then, when we recognized Mr. Han-

leigh as the chap who ordered us away, we thought we'd ask you about it."

Elroy Jefferson was indignant.

"Why, I never heard the like!" he said testily. "He had no authority to order you away. None whatever. In fact, he had no right to be on the island himself. The whole place belongs to me."

"He had no right to order us away, then?"

"No right at all. The island is mine. Mr. Hanleigh, it seems, is anxious to buy it, but he hasn't bought it yet and he won't buy it, as long as the matter is in my hands. He came to me a few weeks ago and offered me five thousand dollars for the place."

"That is a large sum for an island, isn't it?" said Frank.

"More than the place is worth. He came back this morning and raised his offer. Wanted to give me eight thousand dollars if I would sell. But I won't sell. I won't sell him the island at any price, and I told him so. You see, when my wife and son were alive they loved to go there in winter and summer, so Cabin Island has certain associations for me that cannot be estimated in terms of money. They are dead now, and I cannot bear to part with the place. The cabin was erected for the use of my family, and my wife and boy used to go there and watch the workmen building it. So I'm not at all

inclined to turn the place over to strangers."

"I see, sir," remarked Frank sympathetically.

"I'm sorry if Mr. Hanleigh drove you away. He had no right to do that."

"Of course, we had no right there, in the first place," ventured Joe.

"Just as much right as Hanleigh. Now, boys, I have no objection to letting you visit the island from time to time, if the place appeals to you, providing you don't disturb things."

"We would be very careful."

"I'm sure of that. Any time you want to visit Cabin Island, go right ahead. And if Mr. Hanleigh is there and has anything to say about it you can tell him he has no authority and no right to be on the property. I can't imagine why he was prowling around there at all."

"We were thinking of having an outing during the Christmas holidays," said Frank. "Our big difficulty was in finding a good camping place. Why couldn't we stay on Cabin Island, Mr. Jefferson? We could have our outing there, and at the same time we could look after your property."

Elroy Jefferson nodded agreeably.

"An outing, eh? Just you two boys?"

"We have two or three of our chums along with us."

"That would be fine. I envy you. A winter

outing. I think Cabin Island would be ideal for that. And, if Mr. Hanleigh is busying himself ordering people away from there, I imagine it wouldn't be a bad idea to have some one on the ground to look after things. You have my permission, boys. Go ahead, and have your outing at Cabin Island."

"That's mighty good of you, Mr. Jefferson!" exclaimed Frank impulsively, and Joe echoed:

"You bet!"

"Not at all. I know you can be depended on to leave things as you find them. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll put the whole matter in your charge and I'll turn over the keys of the cabin to you. I think you'll find it a very comfortable place."

That was how the Hardy boys and their chums received permission to hold their winter outing on Cabin Island.

## CHAPTER VI

### Preparations

When the Hardy boys returned home after their visit to Elroy Jefferson they hastened to tell their father about the munificent reward the antique dealer had given them for recovering his automobile. Then came the momentous matter of securing permission for the vacation outing.

Fenton Hardy listened with a smile.

"So you want to leave us during the Christmas holidays," he said. "You don't mind missing Christmas dinner, with the turkey and the pudding and the nuts and raisins and candy. You don't mind going without your presents this Christmas. You'd rather go camping."

"Would we *have* to miss our presents?" asked Joe anxiously.

"Well, you know that Christmas presents are usually given out on Christmas morning in this house. If you're not here——"

"Couldn't we get them before we go away?"

Mr. Hardy laughed. "You want presents and outing both, I see. Well, I suppose it can be arranged. I have no objections to letting

you go camping, seeing Mr. Jefferson has been good enough to allow you the use of Cabin Island. If you take proper equipment with you, plenty of food and blankets, you should be comfortable enough. As a matter of fact," he murmured, "I wouldn't mind going with you myself."

"Will you come, Dad?" shouted Frank.

"I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to get away. Go ahead with your outing—if your mother agrees."

Mrs. Hardy, it appeared, had no objections, although at first she was reluctant in view of the fact that the boys would be absent from the family circle over Christmas Day. "It won't seem like Christmas without my lads," she said.

Aunt Gertrude, of course, insisted on contributing her "two cents' worth," as Joe expressed it.

"Camping in the winter time!" she sniffed. "I never heard the like of it. They'll freeze to death."

"We'll be just as comfortable as if we were in town, Aunt Gertrude," said Frank. "The cabin is well built and warm, and we'll have plenty of heavy blankets with us."

"You'll need 'em. As for being comfortable, I'll warrant you'll be glad to come humping back home where everything is nice and cosy.

You'll find a big change, my fine young men, when you get away down in that rickety shack, with the wind blowing through the chinks and the snow drifting in on the floor. If you stay there longer than one night, it will be a big surprise to me."

"Of course," put in Joe, "if you think you will miss us so very much—if you really think it would spoil your Christmas not to have us here, why we won't go."

Aunt Gertrude laughed mirthlessly.

"Spoil my Christmas! The idea! It will be a real merry Christmas again, without two noisy boys making life a botheration to me."

"In that case, then, we'll go camping," said Frank.

When they told Chet Morton of their interview with Elroy Jefferson, that youth was loud in his delight. He insisted promptly on being included in the proposed outing.

"The family is going to Boston for the holidays," he said. "They were going to leave me at home alone. It looked like a fine Christmas! But now—oh, boy! When do we start?"

"Three days before Christmas."

"Great! Who else is coming?"

"We promised Biff Hooper."

"Sure! Biff's a good scout. But don't make the party too large. That cabin won't hold very many."

"We figured on just the four of us," said Frank. "The ice-boat won't hold any more, anyway."

"Fine. We'd better get together to-morrow and decide how much grub we should take along. We've got to eat, you know."

"You *would* bring that up," laughed Joe. "No fear of going short of supplies when you're in the party. You'll see that we take enough."

"I must keep up my strength," returned Chet, unabashed.

When the boys met Biff Hooper and told him that the outing was assured and that Cabin Island was available, the pugilistic lad turned several handsprings in the snow by way of expressing his delight.

"Yeah!" he shouted. "That let's me out. My Uncle Oscar and his five kids are coming to spend Christmas at our place, and it would have been up to me to entertain the little pests. Now I'm out of *that!* Hurray!"

"This trip seems to be popular," remarked Frank. "Well, you'd better start figuring out what you can contribute in the way of grub. We each carry our own blankets."

"Suits me. I'll take *all* the grub, if you want."

Next day, the four gathered at Biff Hooper's home and, in a very businesslike manner, drew

up a list of requirements for the trip, and apportioned what would be required of each. Inasmuch as Frank and Joe had secured the privilege of Cabin Island and were also giving the use of the ice-boat, Chet and Biff insisted on looking after the matter of food. Each boy was to take along whatever cooking utensils he could beg or borrow from home.

In this manner, with conferences after school and during the noon hours, the boys made their preparations for the outing, and the last days of the autumn term slowly dragged past. They had decided to leave Bayport three days before Christmas, almost immediately after school closed, and the intervening time was occupied by putting the ice-boat in readiness and accumulating everything they would need.

"We don't want to keep trotting back to the city every day for something we've forgotten," Chet pointed out.

At last, everything was in readiness. The food supplies were packed, the blankets were stowed away, the ice-boat had been overhauled, the boys had loaded skates, skis, and snowshoes on their craft, and everything had been checked over so that nothing would be forgotten. News of the proposed outing had circulated among the other boys at the Bayport high school and the Hardy boys were besieged with requests from many of their chums who wanted to ac-

company them. But they were obliged to refuse. The cabin was large, but it would not accommodate everybody.

Finally, school closed. There were the usual closing exercises, which the lads sat through impatiently, and then they raced toward home, for the trip to Cabin Island was definitely scheduled for the morrow.

Mrs. Hardy had taken liberties with the calendar, and when the boys came home that night they found, to their unbounded delight and astonishment, that the Christmas dinner had been set ahead. There was a turkey in the oven and the kitchen was redolent with the savory odors of a Christmas feast.

"Whoopee!" cried Joe. "We shan't miss our Christmas after all!"

The dinner, being in the nature of a surprise, surpassed all previous Christmas dinners. Somehow, the turkey was more succulent, the mince pie had a better flavor, simply because the boys had been resigning themselves to missing the good things that year. The mere fact that the calendar indicated Christmas Day as being actually four days off seemed to matter little.

Mr. Hardy had even ordered a Christmas tree and, after dinner, when the boys went into the library and found that even this crowning touch had not been omitted, they felt that life

had little more to offer. The tree glittered with lights and there were certain mysterious packages in tissue paper that aroused speculations. Frank and Joe immediately dashed upstairs and returned with the presents they had bought for their parents and for Aunt Gertrude, which they distributed at the base of the tree.

"I think we're lucky," said Frank, when they went to bed that night.

"Lucky! I never expected to have Christmas and our outing too," returned his brother.

"Christmas dinner, a tree, and our presents!"

"I hope Chet and Biff get off as well."

They fell asleep, happy.

In the morning, the usual Christmas ceremony of opening the presents was observed. Frank and Joe were unusually fortunate. The usual gifts of clothing, which included neckties, scarfs, socks and shirts came first, then for each of the lads came a complete outing costume of breeches, mackinaw shirts and short coats. To top it all came two small calibre rifles, each with a box of ammunition.

"Don't kill too many rabbits," laughed their father.

Christmas was complete. Frank and Joe had given their parents one of the newest and finest radio sets and to Aunt Gertrude they gave sev-

eral volumes of poems, as that lady was very fond of reading. For once in her life, their aunt did not sniff.

"Just what I wanted!" she beamed. "I have always adored Longfellow!"

At that moment the telephone rang. Chet was calling.

"All set!" he reported. "Biff and I are down here waiting."

"We'll be with you in a minute," said Frank.

So the Hardy boys set out on their vacation outing to Cabin Island. Little did they dream of the many strange happenings in store for them.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Other Ice-Boat

Chet Morton and Biff Hooper, it appeared, had not missed Christmas either. Their parents had surprised them just as Mr. and Mrs. Hardy had surprised Frank and Joe, and when the lads met at the boathouse half an hour later their preparations for an immediate departure were somewhat hindered by joyous discussion of the presents each boy had received. Among Biff's gifts was an ice-boat from his father, over which the lad was ecstatic.

"Well, let's go!" shouted Chet finally. "We can talk it all over when we get to Cabin Island."

They clambered into the ice-boats, Chet getting into Biff's new craft with the proud owner.

"Ready!" cried Frank.

"Ready!"

"We're off!"

The boats glided out onto the ice of the bay. There was a stiff breeze blowing and the boys anticipated a quick run to the island. The wind was strong and the sky was clear. The two boats sped alongside one another, their sails billowing.

The city was swiftly left behind and the open bay lay ahead. The winter air brought the flush of health to the boys' cheeks. Once in a while they waved to one another. The shores sped past.

Frank, at the tiller of the Hardy boys' craft, swung the boat around so that it got the full benefit of the breeze, and it forged ahead, leaving the other behind. This meant a race, so Biff brought his boat around with the wind and soon managed to overhaul his rivals. A vagrant breeze gave him the advantage for a while and he gained steadily while the Hardy boys, to their chagrin, lagged behind, but the breeze soon changed. Biff found himself running against the wind before he realized it. The Hardy boys' craft scudded swiftly across the ice, overtook him, then shot across his bows.

Frank and Joe maintained their lead from then on, taking advantage of every change in the wind, and in due time they came within sight of the dark bulk of Cabin Island, looming against the distant line of the shore.

Joe stood up and waved his arms in excitement. There was an answering wave from Chet, in the speeding craft to the rear.

Frank swung the boat toward the south, down into the cove. They drew closer to the island.

"Our friend Hanleigh can't bother us now," laughed Frank.

"We have full authority. It was a mighty lucky thing for us that we mentioned Cabin Island to Mr. Jefferson."

"I wonder what Hanleigh was doing on the island, anyway."

"I'll bet he was up to no good," said Joe. "Well, we won't worry about him. He won't trouble us."

However, Joe was destined to be mistaken.

The ice-boat sped across the glassy surface, drawing closer and closer to Cabin Island. Frank, peering ahead, suddenly gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Looks as if some one is here ahead of us."

"Where?"

Frank pointed to the little bay where they had landed on their previous visit. A white-sailed object was clearly outlined against the dark background of trees.

"Another ice-boat!"

Joe gazed at the strange craft in consternation.

"I wonder what that means."

"We'll soon find out. Somehow, that boat looks familiar to me," said Frank, as he steered toward the bay.

As they came closer, they saw that the other boat was deserted. Frank could not escape

the conviction that he had seen the boat before. Slowly, he veered around until they ran alongside, within a hundred yards of the bay. Then he nodded.

"I knew it," he said quietly.

"That's the boat Tad Carson and Ike Nash were in the other day!" exclaimed Joe.

"There's something queer about this business. I wondered why they were so close to Cabin Island when we met them. I'll bet they were coming here to get Hanleigh."

"Perhaps you're right. What shall we do now, Joe?"

"Scout around a bit. We may learn something."

Frank did not go toward the bay. Instead, he guided the boat around the arm of the island. The boys signaled back to Biff and Chet, indicating that they were to follow.

"It beats me why Tad and Ike should be here, unless they have some connection with this fellow Hanleigh," said Frank.

"And I don't see why Hanleigh should be here at all. He hasn't bought the island yet. According to Mr. Jefferson, he has no business here."

"We'll run around the island once, and see what's what."

The Hardy boys did not have long to wait. Circling the end of the island, they came to a

sheltered nook where they decided to land.

"We can leave the boats here and go up toward the cabin on foot," decided Frank. "If there is anybody here, we'll have a better chance of taking them by surprise."

They put in to the little bay and then waited until Chet and Biff, in the other boat, came up.

"What's the matter?" asked Chet, when their craft came to rest. "Who owns that other boat?"

"That's what we want to find out. We figured it would be best to lie low until we find what's going on around here," Frank told him.

"Good idea," approved Biff.

"That boat belongs to Tad Carson and Ike Nash. I thought the best plan would be to land here on the quiet and then go up to the cabin. They have no right here, and I'd like to know what they're up to."

The boys alighted from the boats. There was a sloping hillside before them, leading to a clump of evergreens. The snow was unbroken.

Frank took the lead and advanced up the slope. The others followed. When Frank reached the evergreens he paused and looked about. To his right he could see another bay farther down the shore, and there he spied a small boathouse.

The boathouse itself would not have attracted his attention so greatly had it not been

for the fact that he saw a distinct line of footprints in the snow leading toward the rear door. Frank had his wits about him sufficiently to notice that the footprints were those of two people and that they led toward the boathouse —not away from it.

"Somebody there now," he commented briefly.

He led the way toward the boathouse. The others trudged silently after him.

Near the little building, Frank suddenly stopped and raised his finger to his lips. He had heard voices. With renewed caution, the boys stole forward. In the lee of the boathouse, they halted. Frank listened. He had heard the murmur of voices from some distance back. He pressed close to the boards.

"Well," he heard a voice saying, "it's none of my business, so I'm not going to worry about it."

Then there was a second voice.

"I'm not worrying. I'm just wondering."

"We have our money. That's all that should concern us."

"Nothing wrong in wondering what he's up to, is there?" said the other. "I think there must be something important around that old cabin."

Frank turned to the others.

"Tad Carson and Ike Nash!" he whispered.

He turned to the wall of the boathouse again.

"I tell you, he wouldn't pay us for bringing him out to Cabin Island so often unless there was something behind it," Ike Nash was saying.

"That's all right. What if there is something behind it?" returned Carson. "It's none of our affair. He pays us. That's all we want. If Hanleigh cares to spend his time prowling around this island, why should we worry, as long as we get our money?"

The Hardy boys and their chums glanced at one another in surprise.

Hanleigh!

The man who had ordered them away from Cabin Island on their previous visit! The man whom Elroy Jefferson had said wanted to buy the place!

"I don't see why he won't let us go up to the cabin with him," grumbled Nash. "What does he want to keep secret from us?"

"That's his business," snapped Tad Carson. "If you go asking questions, then you'll just spoil everything. Leave well enough alone."

"Well, what are we going to do now? That's what I want to know."

"Stay where we are. He told us to leave the ice-boat and wait here until he came down from the cabin. Those are his orders. We get paid for obeying orders."

"Fine place to stay in!"

"What did you expect? A palace? We'll stay where we are. He said he wouldn't be long."

"He's been up in that cabin for half an hour already. What's keeping him?"

"I don't know and I don't care," snapped Tad Carson. "He's paying us to wait here for him, and we'll wait."

Without a word, Frank Hardy turned away and motioned to the other boys. In the deep snow they moved silently from the boathouse.

"Hanleigh's up at the cabin now," said Frank, when they were beyond earshot. "I think we'd better go up and find out what he's doing."

"Right!" approved Chet.

In single file, the boys went back up the slope in the direction of the cabin at the north end of the island.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Suspicious Actions

"Well, I guess that explains why Tad Carson and Ike Nash were heading in this direction the day Hanleigh ordered us off the island," Frank Hardy said, when the boys were out of earshot.

"They were on their way to bring Hanleigh back to town," agreed Joe.

"He's been using their ice-boat to get back and forth to Cabin Island."

"Wonder what's the big idea," remarked Chet. "They don't seem to know what he's up to."

"No, but we will—and mighty soon. We're responsible for the cabin now, so it's up to us to find out what Hanleigh is doing there."

Biff looked dubious.

"He won't tell us, you can depend on that. Probably he'll tell us to clear out of here."

"What if he does? We now know he hasn't any authority. I'll tell you what we ought to do, fellows," said Frank. "We should try and catch our friend Hanleigh off his guard. If we detour around through the woods, we can come out at the back of the cabin. He'll never hear

us coming through the snow. We'll take a peep through one of the windows and see what it's all about."

"That's a long way around," grumbled Chet.

"It won't take us far out of our way. The snow isn't very deep. We can make it easily enough. Come on."

Under Frank's leadership, the boys set out into the woods, trudging through the snow, detouring in order that they would not emerge at the front of the cabin. At last they were within sight of the little building. It seemed utterly deserted, but the boys were quite convinced, from what they had overheard at the boathouse, that Hanleigh was somewhere in the immediate neighborhood. They advanced cautiously.

At the rear of the cabin was a small window. They made this their objective. In the light snow their footfalls made no sound.

Frank took the lead. The others stood back for a moment while he went ahead, pressing close to the cabin wall. When he was at the window, he peeped in carefully. Frank gazed into the interior of the building for a short time. Then he turned and beckoned to his companions.

They came forward. Together, the boys looked into the cabin.

The interior design of the building was simple. One long room, with a huge stone fire-

place, ran the length of the cabin. Bedrooms and a kitchen led off to the side. From the rear window the boys could see every detail of the main room, and as they now looked they could see a man standing before the fireplace.

Although the man had his back turned to them, they had little doubt but that he was Hanleigh. Frank and Joe nudged one another in excitement.

Hanleigh was quite unconscious that he was being watched. He stood before the fireplace, a long, slender stick in his hand. He stepped forward, measured a section of the stone chimney, stepped back and regarded the measured part, got down on his hands and knees and measured the base. Once in a while he shook his head in disgust and muttered something that the boys could not overhear.

The boys were puzzled. Why should Hanleigh be measuring the fireplace in this abandoned cabin?

In their eagerness, they forgot caution and gradually crowded closer and closer together until all four faces were pressed full against the windowpane. Had Hanleigh chanced to turn their way he would have seen them in a moment.

However, the man seemed too greatly occupied. He was concerned just then with the fireplace and evidently he considered himself

quite safe from observation. Back and forth he went, examining the interior and exterior of the fireplace and the chimney, measuring it from every possible angle, even counting the number of stones. He took an envelope from his pocket and jotted down figures on the back of it.

Suddenly, there was a gust of wind.

The side door of the cabin, through which Hanleigh had evidently entered, blew wide open.

With a mutter of astonishment, the man swung around. He looked toward the door.

The Hardy boys and their chums ducked beneath the level of the window sill. But they were too late.

Hanleigh had seen them. They heard a shout of consternation. Then they heard heavy footsteps on the cabin floor. The door slammed. Hanleigh came running around the side of the building.

"Hold your ground!" advised Frank quietly to his companions. "Don't let him bluff us."

Hanleigh, red with wrath, confronted them. He recognized the Hardy boys at once.

"Spying on me, are you?" he shouted. "I thought I told you boys to stay away from this island."

"You told us," returned Frank coolly.

"Then what do you mean by this?" roared

Hanleigh. "What do you mean by coming back here again? I've a good mind to horsewhip the whole crowd of you. A bunch of meddling youngsters! Now get out of here and stay away. If I catch you fellows on this island again, I'll—I'll——"

"You'll do nothing, Mr. Hanleigh," said Frank.

The man looked at them suspiciously.

"How do you know my name?" he demanded.

"It doesn't matter how we come to know your name. But we're here to tell you this, Mr. Hanleigh—you have no right to order us off the island. As a matter of fact, it works the other way."

"What?"

"We're not trespassing. You are. You have no right to be on this island at all. And you certainly have no right to be in this cabin."

"Why, you young whippersnapper!" choked Hanleigh. "I'll show you if I have any right to be here!"

"You can't show us. What are you doing here, anyway?"

"None of your business!"

"It *is* our business." Frank reached in his pocket and produced the key to the cabin. "See this key. Mr. Jefferson gave it to us. We're in charge of Cabin Island from now on. I'd

advise you to clear out unless you want us to report the matter to Mr. Jefferson. He can very easily have you prosecuted for trespassing on the island. He told us you had been given no permission to come here."

Hanleigh was at a loss for words. This development came as a complete surprise to him.

"It's a—a lie!" he gasped finally.

"There's the key!" piped Chet. "Laugh that off."

"I don't believe Jefferson gave you that key at all."

"Oh, yes, he did. We know more about you than you think, Mr. Hanleigh. We know you've been trying to buy this place and we know Mr. Jefferson refused your offer. We were at his house the day you offered him eight thousand dollars for the place and he turned you down. Does that look as if we don't know what we're talking about?"

"What do you know about this place?" demanded Hanleigh.

"Nothing except what we've told you," Frank continued. "We would like to know, though, just why it is so interesting to you."

The shot went home. Hanleigh licked his lips nervously, then stared at the boys in silence for a while before replying:

"It isn't interesting to me," he said lamely. "That is—except as a cabin I'd like to buy."

"Was that why you were measuring the fireplace so carefully?" put in Biff dryly.

"I'm not going to argue about it. I'm going back to town and take up this matter with Jefferson. He gave me to understand that he wanted to sell the island, but he wants too much money for it. That's why I came out here to look the place over."

"You seem to come out quite often," remarked Frank. "Well, you'll find us in charge here from now on. Any time you can bring us a note signed by Mr. Jefferson, stating that you have permission to visit the place, we'll let you in. Just now, though, I think you'd better clear out."

Hanleigh clenched his fists, glared at the boys for a moment, and then turned on his heel. Without another word, he went away. The boys followed him around the side of the cabin and watched him as he strode heavily down the slope, muttering to himself.

"We'll see that he does go away," declared Frank.

The boys followed.

Near the edge of the cliff they saw Hanleigh turn and look back. He seemed surprised to find that they had followed him. Then, evidently deciding that further opposition was useless, he went on down the path that led to-

ward the boathouse at the base of the cliff.

The boys stood watching until he reached the boathouse, and they watched until he emerged again with Tad Carson and Ike Nash. The trio stood looking up for a moment, and Hanleigh shook his fist in their direction.

"Merry Christmas!" shouted Chet.

If Hanleigh heard the greeting, he did not return it in kind.

The interlopers went on down the shore toward the place where they had left their ice-boat. They vanished around the bend. After a while, the boys saw the ice-boat emerge into the open bay and recede swiftly in the direction of Bayport.

"That's that!" exclaimed Biff cheerfully.

"He didn't have a leg to stand on, did he?" added Chet.

"I don't think we're through with Hanleigh yet," said Frank thoughtfully. "He isn't the sort to back down so easily at the first sign of fight. I have an idea that we'll see him on Cabin Island again before very long."

"Let him come," said Chet. "We have the authority. All he has is nerve. Let's put the ice-boats up in the bay and get our stuff unloaded."

The boys turned and went back toward their ice-boats.

"Just the same," muttered Joe, "I'd like to know what he was up to, measuring that fireplace so carefully."

Joe's thought was echoed in the minds of all. There was some mystery about Hanleigh's visits to Cabin Island.

## CHAPTER IX

### Night on Cabin Island

It took the boys the greater part of the day installing themselves in the cabin on the island and "getting everything shipshape," as Chet expressed it, by nightfall. After they had made the boats secure they were obliged to make numerous trips from the shore to the cabin, bringing up supplies, but by the time the early winter twilight fell they had managed to make the place very cosy and habitable.

They were too busy to discuss the strange affair of Hanleigh. Mid-afternoon had brought a rising wind that sent sheets of snow scurrying across the frozen surface of Barmet Bay and they saw that a storm was approaching, which made them more anxious to get settled by night.

They drew lots for the position of cook, the agreement being that each boy should alternate, a day at a time. Chet, to his relief, won the first appointment. As he did not relish the business of tramping back and forth to the iceboats in the snow, the arrangement was to his entire satisfaction and he was soon busying himself at the warm stove endeavoring to pre-

pare a savory stew for their evening meal.

"Looks like a dirty night," commented Frank, as he gazed out over the bay. "I'm glad we'll be all snug and settled."

Blankets had been brought up, the beds had been made, the cupboard had been stocked and the main food supplies had been stored in a little room just off the kitchen. The lamps had been filled with oil, and Biff had even tacked a few highly colored pictures on the walls, "to take away the bare look of the place."

By nightfall one would have thought the adventurers had been living in the cabin for months.

The rising wind soon became a storm. As darkness fell, the snow began beating against the cabin windows and the gale howled down the great chimney. The boys had decided against using the fireplace for cooking purposes, the kitchen stove being more adaptable, but a roaring fire had been built and it cast a ruddy glow throughout the main room of the cabin.

Chet, with an apron tied about his corpulent waist, emerged from the kitchen from time to time, reporting the supper as "nearly ready," and each announcement was greeted with groans, for the fragrant odors were whetting the boys' appetites. At last, however, the table was laid, the steaming plates of stew were

brought forth, and the boys fell to. Second helpings were in order, for the stew was excellent and the lads were hungry. Bread and butter, canned peas and corn, an immense mince pie and tin cups of hot coffee went the way of the stew, and in due time the boys sat back, sighing that they could not manage another bite.

Chet beamed with satisfaction when the others complimented him on the meal. The boys sat about the table for a while, laying plans for the forthcoming week, and then they washed the dishes. After that, they explored the rambling old cabin and finally sprawled on rugs before the roaring fire.

"Listen to that wind!" exclaimed Joe. "It sure makes me glad to be indoors by a warm blaze."

"With a full stomach," amended Chet.

"You *would* think of that."

"The place wouldn't seem half as cosy without that fireplace," said Biff.

Frank regarded the great stone chimney.

"It certainly is a whopper. I wonder what Hanleigh was so interested in it for."

"Let's forget about Hanleigh," said Chet. "He won't bother us any more."

"Let's hope not. But, just the same, I'd like to know why he was making all those measurements."

"If he comes back, we'll heave him into a snowdrift and teach him a lesson," suggested Biff. "We won't let him spoil our holiday."

Outside, the storm had become a blizzard. Joe went to the window. He could see nothing but driving snow, and the wind was howling down upon the island. The cabin, staunchly built, scarcely trembled before the impact of the winter gale. The activities of the day had left the boys tired and they decided to go to bed early.

In due time, after much scuffling about and after Biff had chastised Chet for trying to hide his socks in the woodpile, the boys retired for the night and blew out the lamps. The fire glowed red and the night wind howled down the chimney. Under the heavy blankets, the lads were warm and comfortable.

Silence descended upon the cabin.

The boys were just snuggling down to sleep when a terrifying sound rose above the clamor of the wind.

"Owoooooo!"

It was like the wail of some anguished spirit.

With one accord, the boys felt their hair rising upon their scalps. No one said a word. The dreadful wail died away, then broke out again.

"Owoooooo!"

Then came Chet's voice, from between chattering teeth.

"Wh—wh—what was that?"

"Some of you chaps playing a joke on us?" demanded Frank suspiciously.

"N-not m-me," declared Chet.

"Me neither," said Joe.

"It wasn't me," Biff clamored.

Just then the sound broke out afresh.

"Owoooooo!"

It was a long-drawn-out, moaning sound that rose in volume to a veritable shriek, indescribably terrifying.

"Ghosts!" clamored Chet.

"There aren't any such things!" snorted Joe. "It must be the wind."

"You n-never heard the w-wind make a n-noise like that before, d-did you?" stammered Chet.

The other boys were forced to admit that they never had. The sound had a quality that was almost human. Besides, they had been listening to the howling of the wind all evening and at no time had it approached that mournful wail they had just heard.

"Maybe somebody is lost out in the snow and crying for help," suggested Biff.

"How could anybody get out to this island on a night like this?"

"Wait till we hear it again."

They listened. For a long time they did not hear the mysterious sound. Then, with a suddenness that made them all jump convulsively, the wailing was resumed.

"Owooooooo!"

This time, the noise lasted a good ten seconds, rising to a shriek of terror, then dying away to a dismal moaning.

"It's right in this cabin!" Chet said, in a muffled voice which indicated that he had hidden his head beneath the blankets. "It's ghosts—I know it."

"Ghosts, my foot!" exclaimed Frank, scrambling out of bed. "I'm going to find out what is making that racket."

"Be careful," warned Joe nervously.

"I'll help you," declared Biff. He, too, got out of bed, and then there was a yelp of pain, followed by a crash.

"Ow!" yelled Biff.

"What happened?" demanded the others in chorus.

"I barged into a chair. Stubbed my big toe. Ow!"

This relieved the tension a trifle. The others snickered at Biff's predicament. Frank lit the lamp and in its glow the boys were revealed, shivering in their pajamas. Chet's round face peeped out above a heap of blankets.

"Owooooooooo!"

The dreadful sound broke out again. Chet dived beneath the blankets.

"That's the queerest howl I ever heard," declared Biff, rubbing his injured toe. "It certainly isn't the wind."

"It certainly isn't a human being," said Frank.

"It can't be a dog," volunteered Joe.

"Nor a cat."

"Then what is it?"

"Ghosts!" bellowed Chet, from beneath the blankets. "Put out that lamp."

Frank, however, raised the lamp on high and began to prowl about the cabin.

"The noise seemed to come from over this way," he said, moving toward one of the big windows near the front.

Even as he spoke, the sound broke out afresh, immediately above his head.

Frank looked up. He could see nothing, yet that mournful wailing continued, and at last died away again.

"There's certainly nothing up there," he announced, peering into the shadows.

"There must be!" exclaimed Biff, close at his heels.

"Hold the lamp. I'll soon find out."

Biff took the lamp, and Frank dragged a chair over to the wall. He stood on the chair

and began examining the surface of the logs. At last, just when the sound broke out again, he gave vent to a howl of laughter.

"I've found it!"

"What was it?"

Biff raised the lamp.

"Here's your ghost. Come and see it, Chet. A glass ghost."

Frank was pointing to an object embedded between two logs. Chet, his fears laid at rest, emerged from beneath the blankets and came over.

There was a small hole between the logs where the plaster had fallen away. Some one, for some unknown reason, had placed the neck of a bottle in this hole in order to plug it up. On the floor below lay the cork, which had somehow worked its way loose from the bottle neck. The wind, whistling through the glass tube, had created the doleful, fearful sounds the boys had heard.

"Ghosts!" said Frank significantly, as he stepped down, picked up the cork and replaced it in the neck of the bottle.

"I didn't *really* think it was a ghost," murmured Chet lamely.

Then the boys began to laugh. Although they had refused to admit it, all had been puzzled and more or less frightened by the uncanny wailings, and their relief was now expended in

shrieks of laughter at their own expense. But the brave Chet, who had even refused to search for the cause of the sound, came in for his full share of ridicule.

The ghost was not heard again that night. But it was another hour before the boys finally fell asleep, snickering to themselves.

## CHAPTER X

### Stolen Supplies

A complete recital of the boys' doings on Cabin Island during their first two days would be of small interest to any but themselves. Suffice it to say that they enjoyed themselves just as any other group of boys of the same age would in similar circumstances.

Cabin Island was located in a lonely cove, and, as it was some distance away from Bayport, few ice-boats ever ventured so far down the bay. However, this isolation did not mar the holiday. On the contrary, as Joe expressed it, they could easily imagine that they were having their outing in the remote Canadian wilderness, instead of but a few miles from their own homes.

The storm that had welcomed them to the island, died down during the night and when they awakened the next morning they found that there had been a heavy snowfall, with deep drifts. To get down to the ice-boats they had to break trail in real Northern fashion.

"This will spoil the ice-boating," predicted Joe. But, to their delight, they found that the high wind had swept clear great expanses of

the bay, and although there were certain areas where the snow was piled high, by dexterous steering they could skirt these patches and keep to the open ice.

The first morning, they spent clearing a path from the cabin to the ice-boats in the little cove. In the afternoon, they went out in the boats for a while, then returned to the cabin for a piping hot supper. That evening, they sat about the fire, telling stories and chaffing one another. They found that the keen winter air and the wholesome outdoor exercise rendered them sleepy long before their accustomed bedtime and they were glad to turn in shortly after nine o'clock.

"At home I'd raise a rare kick if any one tried to get me to go to bed at this hour," said Biff. "Now I'm mighty glad to hit the hay. Boy, I'm tired!"

The next morning they explored the lower reaches of Barmet Bay, going as far as a little village that nestled in a cove on the southern shore, about three miles to the east of the island. After lunch, they decided to make an exploration of the country along the shore. Leaving the island, they went inshore by ice-boat, then donned snowshoes and went up on to the mainland.

This country was heavily wooded in spots, and they spent an enjoyable afternoon snow-

shoeing far up on the hills, from where they could look down and view the entire expanse of the bay, with Cabin Island looking very small in the distance. To the west, however, they saw that clouds were gathering, and although there was no wind, Frank remarked that he was sure a storm was rising.

"I guess we'd better get back before we get caught in any blizzard," he decided.

Joe had been peering at Cabin Island, an intent expression on his face.

"Do any of you chaps see any one on the island?" he said.

All looked. The island seemed deserted.

"You must be dreaming," scoffed Chet. "There's no one there."

"I can't see any one now, but I'm sure I saw some one moving against the snow down by the northern end of the island."

"Perhaps it was some animal," Biff suggested.

"It looked like a man. Of course, he was so far away that I can't be sure. I just caught a glimpse of him."

"Well, we will find out when we get back."

By the time they reached the boats again, Frank's prediction of a storm seemed to be in a fair way of being verified. The whole western sky was black and a light breeze sent the snow skimming across the surface of the ice.

"We'll just about make it. Thank goodness, the wind is in our favor," said Frank, as he clambered into his boat.

They started off and made a quick run across the intervening stretch of ice. It was already growing dark when they reached the island. The boys could see the snowstorm approaching down the bay, sweeping toward them like a gigantic gray veil. It was beginning to snow and the air was filled with swirling white flakes.

"Just in time!" shouted Chet.

They put their boats in shelter for the night, then scrambled up the path toward the cabin. Frank unlocked the door and they dashed inside.

"We'll get a fire started and have a feed."

"Feed!" declared Chet. "We'll have a banquet. I'm as hungry as a bear. I could eat my own boots, without salt and pepper."

"You won't have to. There's plenty of grub."

Frank began making up the fire. Chet went out into the kitchen to look over the food supplies with a hungry eye.

A moment later he emerged, his eyes almost popping out of his head.

"It's gone!" he gasped.

"What's gone?" demanded Joe.

"The grub!"

"What?"

"Every speck!" Chet was almost tearful. "There isn't a bit of food in the kitchen."

"There was plenty there this morning," said Biff. "What happened to it?"

"Stolen. Come and see for yourselves."

They all trooped into the kitchen.

Chet had spoken only too truly. All their food supplies had disappeared. The shelves had been swept clear. The lads gazed at the empty kitchen in consternation.

"Well, what do you know about that?" breathed Joe.

"Old Mother Hubbard had nothing on us," muttered Biff.

Frank's face was serious.

"I guess you were right, Joe, when you said you saw some one on the island. Some thief has been here while we were away. That's a mighty mean trick. He hasn't left us even a loaf of bread."

"And a fine chance we have of getting any to-night, either," Biff pointed out. "We can't get back to town in this storm."

The boys were disconsolate. The prospect was cheerless. After an entire afternoon in the open their appetites had been whetted to razor edge.

"Take off your boots, Chet," said Joe, with

a feeble attempt at a joke. "You can have your chance at eating them now."

This effort fell flat. The boys were in no mood for jesting now. The loss of their food supplies was a serious matter.

"I wonder who could have done it," said Chet.

Frank shrugged.

"Looks like some of Hanleigh's work."

"But why would he try to steal our supplies? What good would that do him? Perhaps it was only some sneak thief who chanced in here and saw a chance to make a good haul."

"Perhaps. But I imagine it was Hanleigh. He knew we were here."

"Wants to get us off the island," remarked Joe. "Perhaps he figured that if he stole our food, we'd have to clear out."

"We'll show him."

"But in the meantime," moaned Chet, "I'm hungry."

"Looks as if you'll have to go without eating until morning. We can go down to that little village and buy some more food then."

Chet patted his empty stomach.

"But I can't wait until then."

"You still have your boots," Joe reminded him again.

Then a thoughtful look crossed Chet's face.

"Just a minute!" he shouted, and ran out of the room.

"What's he up to now?" demanded Biff.

They soon found out. Chet returned with one of the packsacks from under his bed.

"I just remembered. When we were unpacking the grub I forgot to take everything out of this packsack. Look!" He delved into it and produced half a loaf of bread, three tins of sardines, a can of salmon and a small quantity of tea in a canister.

The others raised a cheer of delight.

"Hurray!" shouted Biff. "We won't starve after all."

"You *forgot* to unpack it, did you?" said Frank pointedly. "I'll bet you didn't forget. You just cached that grub away in case you might get hungry some time during the night."

"Now what good would a can of sardines do me in the middle of the night?" asked Chet.

"I know you. Never knew of you taking any chances on running out of food yet," Frank told him. "Well, this time it worked out all right. We'll help you get rid of your little supper, Chet."

"There isn't very much."

"Enough to keep us from starving, at any rate."

Soon, with a blazing fire casting a glow through the cabin, with the lamps lighted and

with the table spread, the lads felt more cheerful. The meal was not at all what they had anticipated as a conclusion to their day, but their appetites were too keen to admit of any fault-finding.

"I suppose this means we go without breakfast," groaned Chet, as soon as he had finished the last sardine.

"That's right! Start worrying about breakfast the moment you've finished your supper," said Biff. "I never saw such a hungry wolf in all my life."

"I'm not hungry now, but I'll be hungry in the morning."

"Then wait until morning before you start talking about it." Frank got up and went over to the window. "Another wild night. If it weren't for this storm we could have made the run to the village and back to-night, with more food."

"I hope the storm dies down by morning," muttered Chet gloomily.

"If it doesn't, you'll probably die of starvation."

"Just wait until I lay my hands on the fellow who played this dirty trick on us, that's all. Just wait!"

"It was Hanleigh, I'm sure of that," Frank said. "I'd give a lot to know why he's so anxious to get us away from this island!"

"He won't freeze us out now. We'll stay here to the last minute," said Joe firmly. "And after this, believe me, we'll keep an eye on the supplies."

"You bet we will!" declared Chet. "From now on, I appoint myself guard of the food supply—providing we get some more food for me to guard."

The lads finally went to bed, although Chet had to be silenced on a number of occasions when he persisted in inquiring as to the probability of reaching the village and returning next morning before their usual breakfast time. Before slumber claimed them all, however, Frank expressed the common thought when he observed:

"Just wait until we meet Mr. Hanleigh again!"

## CHAPTER XI

### Postage Stamps

Next morning, the snowstorm having abated, the boys went outside in a futile search for footprints. The snow had obliterated any tracks the thief might have made in the immediate vicinity of the cabin, but down by the boathouse, on the side sheltered from the wind, they found several footprints. Frank took measurements of them.

"Might come in useful some day," he commented. "I should say they were made by a fairly big man."

"How about food?" asked Chet, who had gone without breakfast.

"Right away. Joe and I will take our iceboat and go down to the village. You and Biff had better stay here."

"Can't I go with you? Perhaps I could get something to eat at the village, and I wouldn't have to wait so long."

"You'll eat with the rest of us," laughed Frank.

"Why do you want Biff and me to stay?"

"I'm thinking the thief may not have taken those supplies away with him. If Hanleigh

did it, his purpose would be served by merely hiding the food. You and Biff can spend your time hunting around the island. You may find where the grub has been hidden."

Chet's face lighted up at this probability.

"Come on, Biff!"

The Hardy boys got into their ice-boat and started off, leaving their two chums hopefully searching for the lost supplies.

The wind was favorable, and the Hardy boys reached the little village down on the mainland in a short time. It was a summer resort, and at this season of the year most of the houses were closed and boarded up, but a few permanent residents stayed on the year round, among them being the general storekeeper. His name, as it appeared from a weatherbeaten sign hanging above the store, was Amos Grice.

The boys left their boat by a little wharf which was almost covered with snow and made their way toward the store.

An elderly man with chin whiskers peered at them through his glasses as they entered. He was sitting behind the stove, reading a newspaper and munching at an apple, and he was evidently surprised to see any customers so early in the morning, particularly strangers.

"How do, boys! Where you from?" he asked.

"We're camping on an island farther up the

bay," Frank explained. "We came here in our ice-boat."

"Camping, hey? Well, it ain't many that camps in the winter time. As fer me, I think I'd rather set behind the stove when the colder weather comes on. It's more comfortable. What can I do for you?"

"Some one raided our cabin last night and stole all our food. We want to get some more supplies."

"Stole all your food!" exclaimed Amos Grice, clucking sympathetically. "Well, now, that's too bad. Fust time I ever heard of any thievin' in these parts. Was it a tramp, do you think?"

"We don't know who it was, but we have an idea. I don't think it was a tramp. Just somebody trying to do us a bad turn."

"A mean thing to do," commented Mr. Grice, wagging his head. "Well, I guess I can fix you up all right. What do you want to buy?"

The boys spent some time giving the storekeeper an order, and when the goods had been wrapped up, Amos Grice invited them to sit down beside the cracker barrel and "chat for a while."

"It ain't often I see strangers in the winter time," he explained.

Frank and Joe told him that they could not stay very long, because their chums were back

at the island, awaiting their return with the supplies.

"Back at the island, hey? What island?" insisted Amos Grice.

"Cabin Island, it's called."

"Cabin Island, hey? Why, ain't that Elroy Jefferson's place? Little island with a big log cabin on it?"

"That's the place."

"Why, I know Elroy Jefferson very well. When he was living on the island in the summer months he used to come down here for his supplies." Mr. Grice cackled with delight at having found a common topic of conversation. "Yes, I know Elroy Jefferson real well. He's a fine fellow, too, but very queer."

"He's a bit eccentric," agreed Frank.

"Yes, he's a queer old chap, but a better man never wore shoe leather. How was he when you was last talkin' to him?"

The boys decided to humor the lonely old storekeeper. Frank reflected that possibly they might learn something about Hanleigh.

"He was quite well. He let us have the cabin for our outing."

"Yes, that's just like Mr. Jefferson. Got a heart of gold, specially where boys is concerned. But queer—mighty queer in some ways," said Amos Grice, again wagging his head. "Do you know"—and he leaned forward

very confidentially—"I really think he married Mary Bender because of her postage stamp collection."

This amazing announcement left the Hardy boys rather at a loss for words.

"He married his wife because of her postage stamp collection!" exclaimed Joe.

"That's what I said. You've heard of the Bender stamp collection, haven't you?" he demanded.

The boys shook their heads.

"Well, I ain't a stamp collector and *I've* heard of it. The Bender collection is supposed to be one of the greatest collections of postage stamps in the world. Why, I've heard tell that it's worth thousands and thousands of dollars."

"And Mrs. Jefferson owned it?"

"Yep. Her name was Mary Bender then, and she inherited it from her father. I got parts of the story from people who knew Mr. Jefferson well. It seems he has always been a collector of antiques and old coins and stamps and things, but one thing he had set his heart on was the Bender stamp collection. But he couldn't buy it. Either Mr. Bender wouldn't sell or Elroy Jefferson couldn't raise the money—but somehow he could never buy them stamps he had set his heart on."

"So he married Mary Bender?"

"Well, now—maybe he didn't marry her *entirely* on account of the stamps. You see, he used to call at the Bender house quite often, trying to get Mr. Bender to sell the stamps, so in that way he met Mary Bender. I've no doubt he fell in love with her, but, anyway, they got married, and after Mr. Bender died his daughter got the stamps. So, of course, then Mr. Jefferson got 'em. His wife turned 'em over to him as soon as she inherited them."

"And then what?" asked Joe, interested.

"Then," said Amos Grice, with great effect, "the stamps disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"They went."

"Stolen?"

"Nobody knows. They just went."

"Haven't they been found?"

"Never been found from that day to this. Not hide nor hair of them stamps has been seen since."

"Didn't they have any clues?" asked Frank. "Were the stamps simply lost?"

"They disappeared," insisted Amos Grice. "And not only the stamps disappeared. There was one of the Jefferson servants dropped out of sight at the same time."

"He probably stole the stamps and cleared out," Frank suggested.

"If he stole 'em, why didn't he sell 'em?

The stamps have never been heard of since they left the Jefferson home. This servant—his name was John Sparewell—could have raised a lot of money by sellin' the stamps, but the stamps would have turned up sooner or later, because only other stamp collectors would have bought 'em. But of all the rare stamps in that collection, not one has ever been found."

"That's a strange yarn," said Frank.

"You bet it's a strange yarn. The stamps were all kept on sheets, in a rosewood box. The day John Sparewell walked out of the Jefferson home, the rosewood box disappeared from the safe it was always kept in."

"Has no one ever heard of Sparewell? Didn't Mr. Jefferson get the police to look for him?"

"Certainly. But the police never found him. They sent descriptions of this man Sparewell all over the world, but he never turned up. Queerest story I ever did hear. Mary Bender died just a short time after. And ever since the stamps were lost, Elroy Jefferson ain't been the same."

Amos Grice wagged his head sadly.

"How many years ago did this happen?" Frank asked.

"Oh, it must be nigh on fifteen or twenty years ago. Guess that explains why you lads

never heard of the Bender stamp case, because there was a lot about it in the newspapers at the time. It was a mighty famous case, I can tell you. It seemed to break Elroy Jefferson all up, because that collection was the pride of his heart, and when it disappeared so strangely, he just didn't seem to take any more interest in anything. What *I've* always said was that if the police could only find this man John Sparewell, they'd find what happened to the stamps."

"That seems reasonable."

"Yep. That's the way I figgered it out. The only trouble was, they never were able to find Sparewell."

"I wonder why he stole the stamps if he never sold them," said Joe.

"I guess he was up against it when he tried to sell 'em. He knew that nobody but stamp collectors would buy the collection, and any stamp collector would recognize the Bender collection right away and tell the police. So perhaps he's never been able to sell them and is waitin' until Elroy Jefferson dies before he tries to make any money out of it."

Frank and Joe got up.

"Perhaps that's what happened," Frank agreed. "Well, Mr. Grice, we've been very much interested in the story, but we must be

getting back to the cabin or our chums will think something has happened to us."

The boys paid for their supplies and then left the store, after saying good-bye to the garrulous old man.

"Come again!" he called after them. "Drop in and have a chat any time you want."

The Hardy boys went down to their iceboat, packed away the supplies of food they had purchased, and headed back toward the island.

"So that's the mystery in Elroy Jefferson's life," mused Joe.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could find the Bender stamp collection for him?" returned Frank.

## CHAPTER XII

### The Notebook

When the Hardy boys returned to Cabin Island they found Chet and Biff awaiting them hungrily.

"We thought you would never come!" moaned Chet. "Quick—where's the grub? We have a fire all ready. Now for some breakfast!"

"You didn't find the stolen supplies, then," said Frank, bringing in a side of bacon they had bought from Amos Grice.

"No sign of the food at all," admitted Biff ruefully. "No, I think the chap who stole that food took it away with him."

"And ate it," growled Chet, as he poured some ground coffee into the pot.

"We hunted every place we could think of—down in the boathouse, under the trees, all around the cabin—but we didn't find the grub."

"All I can say is that he must have been a mighty strong man to pack all that stuff away with him in one trip," remarked Joe.

"That's right, too," agreed Biff. "I never thought of that. Perhaps the supplies *are*

around this island yet. We'll take another look this afternoon."

For the present, however, their immediate interest was the long-delayed breakfast which Chet was enthusiastically preparing. He soon had bacon and eggs, bread, coffee and jam on the table, and the lads attacked the meal with gusto. Eventually their hearty appetites were appeased.

"What now?" asked Joe.

"I think we ought to spend the rest of the day exploring the island," Frank suggested. "We haven't really looked the place over yet and we might just chance to run across those supplies."

The others agreed that his plan was good, so they donned their coats and caps and set about a systematic search of the island.

Frank, in charge of the hunt, outlined a plan of procedure.

"We'll figure it this way," he said. "Suppose we were coming to this cabin to steal those supplies, with the idea of hiding them. Where could we go? There are only certain directions we could go without ending up at a cliff or without finding ourselves in the deep snow at the top of the island. We'll try to put ourselves in the thief's place."

"If it were I," said Joe, "I'd make right for that clump of trees over to the left. Those sup-

plies were heavy. The thief wouldn't want to carry them very far, yet he would want a good hiding place."

"That's right," agreed the others.

"Well, let's tackle the trees, then."

The boys made their way across the snow-covered rocks until they reached the clump of bushes Joe had pointed out, and there they searched carefully, kicking away the snow at the base of the trees, in the hope of uncovering the missing supplies.

But their efforts met with no success. They hunted through the entire grove and the only result of their search was that Chet stubbed his toe when he dealt a vicious kick at a rock hidden beneath the snow.

"We're out of luck here," said Frank finally. "Has any one else any good suggestions?"

"Well," said Biff, "if I stole those supplies I'd hide them down by the shore some place, among the rocks."

"We'll give it a try. What's the nearest way to the shore from the cabin?"

"Down that little path at the back."

"Away we go, then!"

They left the clump of trees and ploughed through the snow toward the defile that led down from the rear of the cabin to the rocks along the ice-bound shore. The rocks were covered with snow, but their round masses rose

irregularly against the background of the ice.

"We have a job ahead of us if we start moving all these rocks," objected Chet, with misgivings.

"We're not going to move 'em," said Frank. "That would take us about five years of steady work. We're just going to kick the snow loose."

They attacked the heaps of rocks, prowling about, kicking gingerly at the snow, dislodging it from the hollows. For some time their efforts met with no success. But at last Biff, who had edged a considerable distance away from his companions, gave a sharp cry.

"I believe there's something here, fellows!"

The others went running over to him.

"What have you found?"

Biff held up an object he had picked up from the snow.

"My foot bumped against this," he explained. "It looks like a can of coffee from our supplies."

"It's the same brand!" declared Chet excitedly.

"We'll hunt carefully all around here," Frank decided. "Perhaps the thief just happened to drop that can of coffee as he was going toward the ice, but perhaps he didn't. It's worth making a good search."

With this clue to guide them, the boys

plunged into the search with feverish activity. The snow flew in clouds as they rolled away the rocks. After a while, Frank and Joe, dislodging a particularly large boulder, gave a yell of triumph.

"We've found it!"

The large rock had been placed carefully on top of two others, protecting a big hollow underneath. And in this hollow the boys found the two boxes containing all of the missing supplies. They had been well sheltered from the snow, and were dry and unharmed.

Chet gave a howl of relief.

"Hidden treasure!" he gloated. "So that's where the supplies went! Come on, fellows! Back to the cabin with them!"

As the lads loaded themselves with boxes, cans, and packages, Frank nodded his head with satisfaction.

"I didn't think they had really been stolen. I guess this pretty well proves that some one hid them here just to get rid of us."

"A mighty mean trick!" snorted Biff.

"If that can of coffee hadn't rolled out, we'd never have found the supplies," observed Joe. "I'd have thought twice before I'd have tackled that big rock."

"Well, we've found the grub, and that's all that matters," came from Chet.

Joe was emptying one of the boxes when he

came across an object that he knew had not been among the supplies originally.

"I wonder what this is," he remarked, picking it up.

The object was a small notebook. He glanced through its pages and found that most of them were blank, although there was a certain amount of writing on the opening sheets.

"What's this you've found?" asked his brother, coming over.

Joe handed him the notebook.

"I'm sure none of us had a notebook like this."

"It isn't mine," said Biff.

"Nor mine," added Chet.

Frank's expression brightened.

"Say, I wonder if it belongs to the chap who stole our supplies. Perhaps it dropped out of his pocket into the box as he was bending over."

"Perhaps the fellow's name is in it," suggested Biff. "Look through it and see."

Frank skimmed the pages.

"Here's where we get the goods on Hanleigh, I'll bet. If this is his notebook, we have positive proof that he stole our supplies."

On the fly leaf of the notebook he came across an inscription. It was a man's name.

But the name was not that of their enemy, Hanleigh.

Written across the page, in a bold, flowing script, they saw the name, "J. Sparewell."

"Well, can you beat that!" exclaimed Chet. "It wasn't Hanleigh, after all."

"Sparewell," mused Frank. "Where have I heard that name before?"

"Nobody around Bayport by the name, that I know of," remarked Biff.

"Nor I," added Chet.

They looked at one another, puzzled. Then Joe made a suggestion.

"Perhaps Sparewell and Hanleigh are the same man."

"Perhaps you've hit it," said Frank. "Sparewell—I'm *sure* I've heard that name before. Oh, now I know! Don't you remember, Joe? Remember what Amos Grice was telling us this very morning? Remember the story he told us about the missing postage stamp collection? Sparewell was the man who disappeared from Elroy Jefferson's home the day the collection was stolen."

"John Sparewell! That was the name. I remember now!" Joe exclaimed. "The very same!"

"What are you fellows talking about?" demanded Chet. "I don't get this at all."

Biff was equally in the dark.

"Who is Amos Grice? What did he tell you? What's all this about postage stamps?"

"The Bender collection! John Sparewell's disappearance!" exclaimed Joe excitedly.

"Hey! Talk sense!" admonished Biff.

"Come on back up to the cabin," said Frank. "We'll tell you all about it. This is sure strange!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### The Cipher

Back at the cabin, with the precious supplies again safely stored away in the kitchen, the Hardy boys and their chums settled down before the fire while Frank and Joe told Chet and Biff about the conversation with Amos Grice. They told the tale of Elroy Jefferson's missing postage stamp collection and about the strange disappearance of the servant, John Sparewell, who had never been heard of since.

"And now we find his notebook among our supplies!" exclaimed Chet. "That's the strangest thing I ever heard of."

"There's an explanation somewhere," said Frank, puzzled.

"How about my idea?" remarked Joe. "Perhaps Hanleigh and Sparewell are the same man."

But Frank shook his head.

"You forget," he said, "that Sparewell was a servant in Elroy Jefferson's home for many years. If Jefferson saw him again he would certainly recognize him, don't you think?"

"That's right. And he has seen Hanleigh.

The man was at his house the day we visited Mr. Jefferson."

"Then how did Hanleigh get the notebook?" asked Biff.

"We're not sure that Hanleigh was the man who stole our supplies," replied Joe. "We think so, but we're not sure."

"It couldn't be any one else," scoffed Chet.

"I don't know," observed Frank. "For all we're aware, there may be more than Hanleigh interested in this island. Perhaps we have a bigger fight on our hands than we imagine."

"It's certainly a mighty deep mystery," Joe said.

"Well, we may find out more about it if we examine the notebook."

Frank began going over the pages.

First of all, were several sheets of accounts, evidently notes of receipts and expenditures. On one page was listed: "Suit, $35. Necktie, $1. Shirts, $6. Postage, 40 cents." A long list of items indicating that the owner of the notebook was a careful and methodical man who kept track of every cent he spent. At the top of the page was written: "October, 1917."

"Why, that's eleven years ago!" Frank exclaimed.

"And Sparewell disappeared fifteen years ago."

"It shows that he was alive for at least four

years after he left the Jefferson place, at any rate."

On the opposite page was a record of receipts, showing money Sparewell had received from various people. These sums were small, showing that Sparewell had not been enjoying a luxurious existence by any means.

On the page following the boys came across a puzzling item.

"Appointment with Jordan on Saturday. My condition is worse. Doubt if I will be able to last out the year. Would appeal to J. but am afraid."

"Wonder what he meant by that," said Chet.

"Perhaps it means he was going to die," Joe suggested.

The boys puzzled over the item for some time, then went on to the next page. It had a number of items concerning the stock market, of little interest. Other pages were filled with equally ambiguous and uninteresting notes. Then another page was filled with a crude drawing in the shape of an irregular oval, with a cross marked at one side.

"Looks like a warped egg," commented Chet.

"Looks to me like a map of some kind," Frank said. "Well, perhaps we'll learn some more about it." He turned the page.

There he found a number of other entries with dates.

"Nov. 3—hire of boat—$3."

"Nov. 4—hire of boat—$3."

"Nov. 6—boat—$5."

"Finished, Nov. 6."

The boys looked at one another, unable to understand.

"He was certainly doing a lot of boating that week," said Frank. Then on the next page he found two words.

"Cabin Island."

"Ah, now we're getting somewhere. 'Cabin Island.' Sparewell had something to do with this place."

"Perhaps that's why he was making so many boat trips," Joe suggested. "He may have been coming here."

On a sudden inspiration, Frank flipped back the pages until he found the mysterious map.

"This much is clear, at any rate. Take a look at that map, fellows. What does it remind you of?"

"Cabin Island!" they shouted.

They had not noticed the resemblance before. Now, it was perfectly clear. Cabin Island was oval-shaped, and in general contour it resembled the crude drawing in the notebook.

"Well, we know now that this man Sparewell

was alive for at least four years after his disappearance from the Jefferson place, and that he was interested in Cabin Island for some reason, and that he probably made several trips here by boat."

"Next page!" said Chet, eagerly.

But the next page puzzled them more than ever. There were several lines written, but, so far as the boys could see, they were simply gibberish.

This was what Sparewell had written:

XZYRM. RHOZMW. XSRNMVB. OVUG.
UILMG. MRMV. UVVG. SRTS.

And that was all.

"A cipher message!" Joe exclaimed.

Chet sniffed.

"A lot of good that does us. We can't make any sense out of that!"

"I'd give my shirt to know what that message means," remarked Biff. "I'll bet it is something mighty important."

"He wouldn't have put it in cipher if it wasn't important," Frank agreed. "Well, this is certainly pretty deep. I wonder if Sparewell really was the man who came here and hid our supplies. The more I think of it, the more it seems to me that he did come here. There's

absolutely nothing in this book to connect it with Hanleigh. His name isn't mentioned from beginning to end." Frank had flipped over the rest of the pages and found that they were blank.

"Why should Sparewell pop up here at this time?" pondered Joe. "Do you think he and Hanleigh may be working together?"

"Perhaps. And still, if Sparewell is still alive, I can't see why this notebook ends where it does. Eleven years have passed since he made these entries."

"He may have kept other notebooks," Joe suggested. "Perhaps he merely kept this one because of the cipher. There was some secret he didn't want others to know, and he kept that notebook in his possession at all times, for fear some one might find it and solve the cipher."

"That sounds reasonable. But I'm afraid we can't do much more unless we can learn the secret of that message."

"It's a tough one," Chet commented.

"Ciphers have been solved before this. Have you ever read Edgar Allan Poe's story called 'The Gold Bug?' In that yarn, he had a cipher to solve and he went on the idea that the letter 'e' was the letter most frequently used in the English language," said Frank. "Suppose we

apply it to this case. Looking it over, the letter most often used in the cipher is the letter 'm.' If we take 'm' to mean 'e'——"

"You've got it!" shouted Chet. "I'll bet we'll solve this riddle yet."

Frank marked down the letter "e" above each place in the cipher where the letter "m" occurred. But he was no farther ahead than he was before. Presuming that "m" should really be "e" he found that it occurred once in the first word—for he took it for granted that each dot in the message represented a division between two words—once in the second word, once in the third, once in the fifth and twice in the sixth. This simply rendered the cipher more confusing than ever, for there was no clue as to what the other letters might be.

"If there was a three-letter word in the message," he said, "we might get somewhere. That's how the fellow in the story worked it. He found a lot of three-letter words, each of the same combination of letters, so he gathered that they would mean 'the' because the letter he thought meant 'e' was at the end of each. That gave him two more letters, 't' and 'h,' to work on, and from there he found the cipher easy."

"Mr. Sparewell was too smart for us," said Joe. "He didn't use 'the' in this message at all, from the looks of things."

"I guess that scheme isn't so good. Well, we have the notebook, and whoever lost it is sure to miss it and come back for it. I think it wouldn't be a bad idea if we kept an eye on that place where the stores were hidden."

"Catch him in the act!" said Biff.

"If the man is Sparewell, I guess Mr. Jefferson will be mighty glad to know where he is. The police have been searching for the man for fifteen years now. If it isn't Sparewell, he'll have a lot of explaining to do concerning this little book and how it came into his hands."

"From now on, then, we keep a weather eye on those rocks," Chet declared. "We ought to stand guard."

"I don't think that will be necessary," said Frank. "It would only frighten him away. The best plan is to watch the place from here. We can easily see any one approaching the island and we can watch to see where he goes. If he heads for those rocks, we'll know we have our man."

"That means that some one has to stay on the island all the time."

"I think it would be best. We can take turns at that, so it shouldn't spoil our outing. Somehow, I don't think we'll have very long to wait. The moment that man finds his notebook is gone, he'll hurry back for it."

The other boys agreed that Frank's plan was

about the best that could be devised toward laying the mysterious thief by the heels. They were tingling with excitement because their outing on Cabin Island had plunged them into the depths of a first-rate mystery.

That afternoon they remained on the island. The next day was Christmas and they were preparing to celebrate it accordingly.

But the intruder did not return that day.

## CHAPTER XIV

### Christmas Day

"I THINK we ought to make this outing an annual affair," said Chet Morton the next morning after the boys had wished one another "Merry Christmas."

"Why?"

"We get two Christmases out of it. It suits me fine."

"If you expect to get any presents around here, you're badly mistaken," sniffed Joe, putting on his shoes.

"I didn't. If I had expected any I would have hung up my stocking. But we'll have a Christmas dinner, anyway. That'll be the second Christmas dinner this week."

"If we hadn't found those supplies, you'd be out of luck for your Christmas dinner to-day. The chicken and the pudding and the Christmas cake were all in those two boxes," Frank said.

"Didn't I know it? But everything is all right now."

"Take a look out the window and see if Hanleigh is snooping around the rocks," advised Biff.

Chet sped to the window.

"A glorious day!" he reported. "A beautiful, sunshiny Christmas day. The only cloud on the whole horizon is that there is no sign of Mr. Hanleigh. The ice is clear and it looks as if we'll have some splendid ice-boating this afternoon. But Mr. Hanleigh is not ice-boating this morning. There is snow on the hillside—but our dear friend Hanleigh is not snowshoeing. But let us not lose hope. He may yet emerge from his hiding place and proceed forth to enjoy the keen Christmas air in the vicinity of Cabin Island, that clear atmosphere that he doesn't want us to breathe."

Chet's rhapsody came to an abrupt halt when Joe hurled a wet towel that caught him squarely on the back of the neck. Frank, who had been appointed cook for the day, put a stop to hostilities by announcing breakfast just then and the lads sat down to piping hot plates of ham and eggs, accompanied by fragrant coffee.

The big surprise came when Frank, with a flourish, drew aside a curtain that had been screening a mysterious table in one corner of the big room. Here, the Hardy boys had put their presents to each other and to their chums. There was a handsome pair of boxing gloves for Biff and a glittering, nickel-plated flashlight for Chet. Frank had given his brother a

new watch-chain and Joe, in turn, had given Frank a pair of cuff-links with his initials engraved thereon.

"Well," said Chet, admiring the flashlight and switching it on and off to see that it was in good working order, after the boys had exchanged thanks for the gifts, "Biff and I thought we were putting something across, too, but you got ahead of us."

And, going into the kitchen, he emerged with some mysterious-looking parcels which he promptly distributed. These were the presents Biff and Chet had arranged to give the Hardy boys and to each other. Frank received a pair of ski-boots and Joe the same. Biff's enthusiasm over a punching bag was long and loud, while Chet himself was delighted with a little book of tickets to the best motion picture house in Bayport.

"I see where I won't do much homework until these tickets are used up," he said, with a wink.

Their presents having been duly examined and admired, the lads donned their outing clothes, with the exception of Frank. As cook, it was his duty to stay and prepare the Christmas dinner, at the same time keeping an eye on the rocks where the supplies had been hidden. The base of the cliff was in plain view of

the big cabin window so there was little danger that the owner of the mysterious notebook would approach unobserved.

"What if he should chance along while you're all away?"

"We never thought of that," said Biff, in dismay. "You couldn't very well handle him alone."

"How about your rifle?" Joe suggested.

"The very thing! Even if you chaps go as far as the mainland, you will be able to hear a rifle shot. I'll fire one shot into the air and that will be the signal to come back as quickly as you can. If he tries to get away, you can easily head him off in the ice-boat."

This arrangement seemed to preclude any possibility of the stranger's escape if he chanced to show up, so Joe, Chet and Biff trooped out. For the morning, they had decided to stay close to the cabin, "so there won't be any risk of missing dinner," as Chet explained, and amuse themselves by fishing through the ice. So, with lines ready and hooks baited with pieces of salt pork, they made their way down the slope and out on the ice.

There they set to work with their hatchets and soon had three holes chopped in the ice. They dropped in their lines and from then on it was a game to see who would catch the first

fish. Chet, of course, raised a clamor every few minutes, claiming that he had a bite, but somehow the fish always managed to get away.

"No wonder," grumbled Biff. "You scare 'em away, with all that racket. Try being quiet for a while and see how it works."

To the astonishment of the others, Chet actually did manage to refrain from noise for the space of five minutes and the plan evidently had good results—but not for Chet. Joe suddenly gave his line a yank. A silvery body flashed through the air and flopped wildly on the ice.

He had caught a good-sized fish and when it has been despatched, the others returned to the ice-holes with renewed enthusiasm. Within a few minutes, Biff was the fortunate one, and a second fish was laid to rest on the ice beside the first. Chet endured the chaffing of the others, who elaborately complimented him on his skill. A moment later, he gave a yell of delight.

"I've got one! I've got one!"

He began to haul and tug at the line.

"A whopper!" gasped Chet. "I can hardly pull him in."

The other boys watched his efforts, their eyes bulging. Chet was struggling with all his might and although he was gradually drawing in his line, there seemed to be a tremendous weight on the end of it.

"Must be a whale!" grunted Chet. "Ah—here he comes!"

He drew in his prize. It rose above the surface of the water. Chet stared at it in disgust.

The "fish" was nothing more than a very battered pail. Chet's hook had somehow caught the handle. Full of water and mud, the pail had almost broken the stout line by its weight.

Joe and Biff whooped with laughter. Joe gave the pail a kick that sent it back into the water again.

"Some fish!" yelled Joe.

"It wasn't a whale. It was a pail!"

Chet glared at his companions.

"I'll show you!" he said.

He baited his hook and again cast in his line. Immediately there was a lively wrench. Chet gave the line a twitch, and this time he did catch a fish. The only drawback to his enjoyment lay in the fact that it was only about four inches long.

"A sardine!" grinned Joe.

However, Chet placed his capture beside the other fish, just as proudly as though it were a ten-pounder.

"It isn't any fault that I caught it before it had time to grow a little more. It might just as easily have been a big one," he said.

The fishing became cold sport after a while, inasmuch as the boys were obliged to stay in

the one place and could not move around enough to get exercise. They soon began to feel the cold and before long began to await the sound of the dinner bell. This, as Frank had warned them, would be achieved by banging the poker against a tin pan.

"Well, if our supplies are stolen again, we can live on fish," remarked Joe cheerfully.

"Not if we depend on Chet to catch them for us," said Biff. "I'm sure we wouldn't make much of a meal out of that whale he caught. A little bit tough for my taste."

Chet was just thinking up a retort in kind when they heard the welcome clatter of the tin pan. With one accord, they hauled in their lines, seized the fish they had caught, and raced madly back to the shore, scrambled headlong up the slope and breathlessly plunged into the cabin.

"What's the matter?" asked Frank, as they made their hurried entry. "Somebody chasing you?"

"Hunger is chasing us!" declared Chet.

"Dinner is ready. Wash up and hop to it."

They needed no second invitation. Frank opened the oven door and a delicious odor of browned chicken permeated the cabin. The Christmas pudding, which Mrs. Hardy had prepared before the boys left Bayport, was already steaming, and the table was loaded high

with good things, pickles, potatoes, "and all the trimmings."

The boys later vowed that of all the Christmas dinners they had ever eaten, with all due respect to the dinners they had sat down to at home, the one that would remain longest in their memories would be the Christmas feast they devoured during their outing on Cabin Island.

The afternoon they spent quietly, trying out their skis on the sloping hillsides on the eastern side of the island. This exhilarating sport made the hours pass quickly, and when the winter twilight fell the boys returned to the cabin, weary and happy.

"The best Christmas ever!" they voted it.

"Well," said Frank, as they sat about the fireplace that evening, "the man who lost the notebook didn't show up to-day."

"He'll be back," said Joe.

"And we'll be ready for him."

"Perhaps he hasn't missed it yet," suggested Biff.

"Perhaps not. What I'm afraid of," Frank said, "is that he won't consider it important enough to come back for."

"Important! Why, the cipher is in it!" exclaimed Joe.

"Yes, but he knows the cipher by heart, no doubt. And the very fact that the message is

in cipher will protect him. He knows that if we do chance to find the notebook, it will be a hundred chances to one that we'll never be able to find out what it means. He may not worry about losing the notebook after all."

The boys were thoughtful.

"We may never catch him, then?"

"I hope so," said Frank. "But we can't count on it too strongly."

"We'll get him," Joe declared. "That message had something to do with Cabin Island. The man will be back here anyway, notebook or no notebook, I'm dead sure."

## CHAPTER XV

### Chicken Thieves

Next morning, although the boys kept a sharp lookout, there was no sign of the marauder.

"We're not going to let him spoil our holiday," declared Frank. "If he decides to come back for his notebook we'll be ready for him, but we don't have to sit around waiting."

"What say we go back and call on Amos Grice?" suggested Joe. "He may be able to tell us some more about Elroy Jefferson and the stamp collection."

"Good idea!" declared Biff. "I'd like to meet the old chap."

Chet said nothing. He was already struggling into his coat. The prospect of a jaunt in the ice-boats appealed to the boys strongly, for it was a bright, sunny morning and the air was keen.

In a short time, the lads were ready, and went scrambling down the slope toward the little cove where the ice-boats were sheltered. Chet, who was anxious to learn how to manage the craft, seated himself at the tiller of Biff's boat.

"Guess I'd better take out some insurance, if you're going to steer," said Biff.

"Don't worry about me, my lad," Chet advised. "Hang on to your cap, for you're in for a swift ride, with plenty of fancy twists and curves."

The Hardy boys got into their own boat, the sails flapped in the wind, then filled out, and the boats sped out of the cove into the open bay.

Chet soon found that steering was not the simple thing it had seemed. He was in difficulties before he was more than a few hundred yards away from the island. Then, essaying a sharp turn, he almost upset the boat.

Frank and Joe could see Biff remonstrating with him, but Chet evidently refused to give up the tiller.

"He means to learn how!" laughed Frank. "I'll bet Biff is sweating. He's afraid Chet will wreck the boat."

"I'm just as glad I'm not riding with them, myself," returned Joe.

At that moment they saw the other boat veer sharply around. The sails bellied in the stiff breeze and the ice-boat came plunging across the bay toward them.

"What's the matter now?" exclaimed Frank. "Is he trying to run us down?"

The boat boomed on, without changing its

course. They had a glimpse of Biff Hooper standing up and waving his arms wildly.

"Guess we had better get out of the way." Frank, who was at the tiller, swung the boat to leeward, and at the same instant the other craft changed its course and was still heading directly down upon them.

Then, to their astonishment, the oncoming boat swerved again, this time with such violence that Biff Hooper lost his balance, staggered, and tumbled out on to the ice. Chet, the amateur, was left alone at the tiller of an iceboat which was out of his control.

Then ensued a weird game of tag. Chet's boat was at the mercy of the shifting winds. It dodged to and fro, plunged from side to side. No one could tell where it was going next. Most of the time, it seemed to be plunging directly at the Hardy boys' boat, and Frank was kept busy steering out of the way.

Once it seemed that a collision was inevitable. The runaway boat swung sharply about, seemed to gather speed as the wind caught it, and then came on with a rush. Frank desperately tried to maneuver his craft out of its course. The other boat was rushing down on him.

"Jump!" shouted Joe.

"Stay where you are!" Frank yelled. There was still a chance. He bore down on the tiller.

The ice-boat swung into the wind just as the other craft went flashing past. They could see Chet, a look of comical fear and amazement on his face, frantically trying to get the boat under control.

Out on the open ice, Biff had scrambled to his feet and was madly pursuing the fleeing craft. Chet managed to get the boat back against the wind, it turned wildly and raced directly at Biff. Then Biff turned and fled. He might have been run down had he not leaped to one side just in time. As the boat was speeding past he watched his chance and jumped.

Biff clambered over the side and crawled over Chet, who gladly moved over to allow him to take the tiller. In a few moments the boat slackened speed. Shortly afterward, Biff had the situation well in hand, turned the boat about, and drove alongside the Hardy boys.

"Are you satisfied?" said Biff, glaring at Chet.

"Must have been something wrong with the steering gear," Chet explained weakly.

"Steering gear, nothing!" snorted Biff. "Something wrong with the fellow who was steering, that's all. After this, I'll take charge of the boat myself."

"You're welcome. I've had plenty."

"Thank goodness!"

"What was the big idea?" shouted Frank "Trying to wreck us all, Chet?"

"No harm done. We'd better forget it," muttered Chet sheepishly. "I can't seem to get the hang of this steering business. I'd rather be just a passenger, anyway."

"That suits everybody," growled Biff. "When I go out ice-boating I don't care to spend half of my time chasing the boat."

Joe snickered. The recollection of Biff slipping and sliding across the ice in pursuit of the runaway craft, and then slipping and sliding with the boat in pursuit of him, appealed to Joe's sense of humor. That snicker was like a match touched to gunpowder, for Frank also laughed, then Chet, and finally Biff himself had to grin. So, in high good humor again, the lads got back into the boats and resumed their journey toward the village.

They reached the little place about ten o'clock and made their way up through the snow to Amos Grice's store, where they found the proprietor sitting beside the stove, munching crackers from the barrel, just as they had last seen him.

"Howdy, boys!" he greeted them. "Come to pay me a call? Sit down and make yourselves at home. Help yourselves to the crackers. I keep 'em here to sell, but somehow it seems I never sell any, although the barrel

keeps gettin' empty all the time just the same. I've been always intendin' to put a cover on that there barrel but I just can't seem to get around to it."

"We found our supplies, Mr. Grice," Frank told him.

"You found 'em, eh? Where were they?"

"Somebody had hidden them on us, as a joke."

"Just this mornin' I was thinkin' about you lads," said Amos Grice. "There's been a couple of thieves around here, too, and I was wonderin' if it was the same ones that swiped your supplies."

"Thieves!" exclaimed Chet.

"Yep. They paid me a visit last night. Stole a lot of my chickens."

The boys looked at one another. Amos Grice laughed. "Not the kind of thieves you're thinkin' about," he remarked. "These ain't two-legged thieves. Four-legged ones. They mighty near cleaned out my hen-house. Seven fine fat chickens I lost."

"Foxes?" ventured Joe.

Amos Grice nodded.

"Foxes! A couple of 'em raided the hen roost last night and made off with seven chickens and I never even caught a sight of 'em at it. If I only had time to leave the store I'd certainly set out after 'em. Still, they may

come back, and if they do they'll find me settin' up waitin' for 'em with a shotgun."

"Perhaps they have a den just outside the village," Biff said.

"I know they have. I ain't the first man to lose chickens here this winter."

"Did they leave any tracks?" asked Frank.

"Plenty of 'em. Come with me and I'll show you."

Amos Grice led the way out of the store toward the hen-house in the back yard. A few chickens, the only ones remaining of the flock, were pecking at some grain. The old storekeeper showed the boys two distinct trails in the snow, leading away from the hen-house, up toward the hill at the back of the store.

"That's the way they went," he said. "With my chickens. I tell you, I had a mighty good mind to close up the store and start after 'em right away. I'd like to get a shot at the rascals."

"Joe and I have a couple of small rifles down in the ice-boats," Frank said. "Perhaps we could try our hand at shooting the foxes."

"Good idea!" approved Chet. "I wish I had a rifle."

"You can have mine," declared Amos Grice. "I have a couple of guns up in the store that I'll let you have. And if you can drill them two foxes I'll be mighty grateful to you."

The Hardy boys and their chums were at once enthusiastic over the idea of a fox-hunt. Amos Grice provided Chet and Biff with rifles while Frank and Joe hastened to get their own weapons. Amos Grice even insisted on lending them his dog.

"If there's any foxes within five miles, that dog will dig 'em out," he said. "Only be sure and not shoot my dog."

"We'll be careful," promised the boys.

"Just follow those tracks in the snow and you'll come right to the den, I'll bet a cookie," declared the old man.

"Let's go!" shouted Joe. "We'll bring back your foxes, Mr. Grice."

"Sure will," added Chet jubilantly.

The boys started off through the deep snow, following the double trail up the hillside.

The dog was a lanky, mournful looking brute who seemed too lazy, as Chet expressed it, "to wag his own tail," but he lived up to his master's recommendation. The moment the boys started following the trail, the dog seemed to have a new interest in life, and he plodded on ahead, sniffing at the trail left by the marauding foxes.

The snow was deep but the boys thoroughly enjoyed the excitement of the chase.

"We didn't expect to blunder into a fox-hunt when we left the cabin this morning, did we?"

said Joe, when the village was out of sight behind them.

"I'll say we didn't," returned his brother. "This beats ice-boating all hollow."

"It will, if Chet will keep from pointing that gun in my direction," said Biff. "He has already tried to kill me once this morning."

Chet, blushing, reversed the weapon, which he had been carrying in a highly dangerous position, with the barrel pointing toward the other members of the party.

They went down into a gully extending several hundred yards to the west, following the tracks that led along the bottom of the ravine, then turned sharply up the slope again toward a thicket of trees. Here and there they could see flecks of blood on the snow.

"That's from the chickens," Frank said, as they strode along.

Suddenly the dog became very active. Reaching the top of the slope, he plunged along in a swift run and soon disappeared among the trees. Then they heard him howling with excitement.

"He's found them!" shouted Chet.

The boys hastened on. When they overtook the dog they found him frantically raising clouds of snow as he dug among some rocks in the depth of the thicket. He had found the den.

The boys knew little or nothing about the habits of foxes, but they reflected that the dog would be scarcely making such a clamor unless the animals were at home. They waited, rifles in readiness.

"Shoot 'em when they come out!" advised Biff, capering about.

The dog suddenly disappeared into the mouth of the den. The lads heard a yelp of pain, and the dog emerged again, his tail between his legs. He scuttled between their legs and headed down the home trail, howling. A moment later he was lost from view.

The lads looked at one another blankly.

"What happened to him?" demanded Biff.

"One of the foxes must have bitten him," Joe said.

A shout from Chet interrupted him.

"Look!"

He was pointing over among the trees. The boys saw a tawny object flash against the snow, then another. The foxes had emerged from their den by the back entrance, evidently alarmed by the intrusion of the dog, and were fleeing for their lives back toward the ravine.

Chet flung his rifle to his shoulder. He was trembling with excitement, but he managed to aim at the foremost fox, and pressed the trigger.

There was only a dull click!

Chet had forgotten to load the weapon.

The others were too excited to notice his discomfiture. They were running about wildly, each seeking a good view of the fugitives. Frank and Biff, noticing the direction the foxes were taking, went plunging through the snow, back toward the rim of the ravine, with the intention of heading the animals off.

Frank tripped over a hidden tree-trunk and went sprawling headlong. He lost his rifle, and while he was searching for it Biff passed him and ran on toward the gully. Chet and Joe, in the meantime, were heading toward the gully in the opposite direction.

Biff emerged at the top of the slope. He looked down into the gully, just as Frank came racing up.

"See them?" demanded Frank.

"Not yet. They must have doubled back."

The boys looked down into the gully. The snow was white and unbroken. Suddenly, at the far end of the gully they saw a movement among the bushes. A moment later, a fox came streaking out of the thicket, followed by its mate. The animals did not see the lads watching at the top of the slope.

"Take your time, Biff," advised Frank, as he raised the rifle to his shoulder.

The foxes were hampered by the deep snow, but even at that they were racing down the

gully so quickly that the boys had to take swift aim.

Bang!

Biff's rifle spoke. The lead fox stopped short, whirled in his tracks and darted back. The other animal did likewise. But Frank's aim was more accurate.

Bang!

The lead fox dropped into the snow, threshed about for a moment and lay still.

The other animal raced madly away, seeking cover. But by this time Biff had ejected the empty shell and had taken aim again. He pressed the trigger, sighting at the fleeing fox.

This time his aim was sure. The animal leaped high in the air, turned completely over and fell motionless in the snow.

"We got 'em!" yelled Biff joyfully. He began scrambling down the slope, anxious to inspect the prize. Frank followed him. At the bottom of the gully they came upon the dead animals, lying only a few yards apart. Each had been killed almost instantly.

"Amos Grice won't lose any more hens after this," declared Frank, with satisfaction.

"Just got them in the nick of time!" said Biff. "In another two seconds they would have been back among the trees and we'd have never seen them again."

Chet and Joe, attracted by the sounds of the

shots, now appeared at the top of the slope. They were astonished when they found that the hunt was already ended and that Frank and Biff had slain the marauders.

"You're lucky, that's all," said Chet solemnly. "Just lucky. It was just by chance that the foxes headed this way instead of going down toward where we were waiting for them."

"Well, *we* had our rifles loaded," said Biff pointedly.

This silenced Chet, as he did not care to start any discussion concerning his failure to load the rifle when he started out on a fox-hunt.

The boys started back toward the village, carrying the dead bodies of the four-legged chicken thieves with them. When Amos Grice saw them enter the store he was almost speechless with amazement.

"Back already?" he exclaimed. "What did you do to that dog of mine? He come back here howlin' his head off and he went and hid under the woodshed and I ain't been able to get him out."

"He found the foxes," explained Frank gravely.

"One of them nipped his nose," added Joe.

"And why are you lads back so soon? Can't catch foxes by just goin' out for half an hour

or so," declared Amos, wagging his head. "It's an all-day job, often."

"Come on outside," invited Chet proudly, as though he had been personally responsible for the success of the hunt.

Amos Grice went outside and when he saw the two foxes lying in the snow, he rubbed his spectacles, as though he thought his eyes were playing him false.

"I wouldn't have believed it!" he said, at last. "I wouldn't have believed it! And yet I can see 'em lyin' there, with my own eyes. If this don't beat the Dutch!"

"We were just lucky enough to catch them at home," explained Frank.

"And smart enough to shoot 'em on the run," declared Amos Grice. "It takes some shootin' to get a fox, lads, for they're mighty tricky rascals. Well, now I can sleep in peace at night and I'll know that my chickens are safe. I can sure breathe easier now that I know them two thieves are through with chicken stealing."

He took the boys back to the store and, by way of showing his gratitude, insisted on filling their pockets with crackers and apples.

"You're welcome at my store any time, lads," he told them. "If ever you need any more supplies, come right to me and—and I'll sell 'em to you at wholesale price."

Seeing that this, to Amos Grice, was the height of generosity, the boys thanked him warmly.

"We've had a rare good morning," declared Frank, "and we're much obliged to you, Mr. Grice, for telling us about the foxes. We wouldn't have missed that chase for anything."

"I'm more'n obliged to *you,*" said the old man.

"I guess we'd better be getting back to the island. It's lunch time now," said Chet.

Before they left, the boys cut the brushes from the two foxes and when they returned to Cabin Island that afternoon they placed the prizes in a place of honor above the fireplace.

## CHAPTER XVI

### The Chimney

In spite of Joe Hardy's predictions that the marauder would be back for his notebook, that afternoon and the next day passed uneventfully on Cabin Island. No one had appeared in the vicinity of the rocks, for the boys examined the place carefully in search of footprints and the snow was still unbroken.

The mystery surrounding Hanleigh, John Sparewell, and the Bender postage stamp collection was gradually receding into the background. But to the Hardy boys it still remained a matter of great concern, especially to Frank. Each evening he sat down and puzzled over the strange cipher, vainly trying to solve the mystery it presented.

"Can't you figure it out?" asked Joe.

"It beats me," said Frank, flinging down his pencil. "Once in a while I think I'm on the right track, then something always happens and I find I'm farther away than ever."

"Let the cipher look after itself. Something will turn up, I'm sure," put in Chet.

"But if we could only find the message of the

cipher, we wouldn't have to wait for something to turn up."

Chet looked at the message again. He shook his head.

"It's too much for me. Don't let it spoil your holiday, Frank."

"You know what I'm like when there's a mystery in the wind. And this is one of the most mysterious puzzles we've ever tackled."

"We'll get to the bottom of it yet. I'm sure of that. Just wait. Something will turn up," said Joe.

The next day, the boys were outdoors from morning until night, skimming over the surface of the bay in their ice-boats, skating on an improvised rink down by the shore, and enjoying themselves on the ski slide. Frank, for the time being, seemed to have dismissed the mystery of the notebook from his mind. That evening, as the boys sat in front of the fireplace, the Sparewell case was not even mentioned. It was a windy, stormy night and the cabin creaked in the gale.

"Must be a good, strong chimney to hold up in a wind like that," remarked Chet.

"Why shouldn't it?" said Biff. "It's made of solid stone."

"I know; but the wind gets a terrific sweep when it hits this island. That chimney isn't so new, either."

"Stone chimneys will last a hundred years," scoffed Joe.

Chet pointed to the big fireplace.

"This one won't. Look. You can see where it is cracked already."

The boys inspected the chimney. They saw that Chet had noticed something that none of them had observed before. There was a distinct crack across the surface of the stone near the ceiling.

"It doesn't look any too secure at that," remarked Frank. "A crack like that might easily cause a fire."

"It sure could!" exclaimed Biff.

"I don't worry about fire so much as the danger that the chimney might come tumbling down in a high wind," Chet said. "If there is one crack like that, there may be others, higher up. And if the chimney ever gave way—wow!"

"We would certainly have a nice little shower of stone," Biff said. "Well, why go looking for trouble? Wait until it happens."

Chet insisted that he was not looking for trouble, but that he was merely pointing out what *might* happen. Just then there was a particularly violent gust of wind. The cabin shook. The chimney was staunch.

"I think it's good for a few years yet," Joe said. "Why worry?"

Their conversation about the chimney, how-

ever, was to be recalled to the boys very forcibly later on.

The next day it was Joe's turn to remain at the cabin as "chief cook and bottle-washer." The others went out in one of the ice-boats and made a trip as far as the village. They did not stop at the little place, being in no mind to incur any of Amos Grice's long-winded conversation, and turned about, sending the fleet little boat swooping down into the wind. They were about a quarter of a mile from the cabin and just debating the advisability of making a trip down into the cove when they heard a sound that aroused them to a high pitch of excitement.

Crack!

Sharp and clear, the sound carried through the winter air.

"The rifle!" exclaimed Frank.

"Somebody down at the rocks!"

Frank swung the boat around toward the island. The wind, however, was against them and he could make little speed. He was obliged to tack about for some time, while the others speculated impatiently on the reason for Joe's signal.

"Just when we need speed, the wind is against us!" groaned Biff.

"Perhaps the fellow will clear out before we can get back."

"Not if I know it," said Frank grimly. "We'll come around on the other side of the island, and if he is making a getaway we can head him off."

The boat seemed to labor slowly forward at a snail's pace. Anxiously, the boys peered toward the island.

They could see no one.

"Perhaps the shot didn't scare him away," said Chet hopefully.

They circled around until at last they had a full view of the side of the island on which the stolen supplies had been hidden. The ice was bare. The hillside was bleak. There was no sign of any human being.

The boys brought their craft around until they were close to the rocks. They could see footprints in the snow.

"There was somebody here, all right," said Frank, in excitement.

"I wonder if it was Hanleigh!"

"We'll mighty soon find out."

They brought the boat inshore and took in the sails. Then they scrambled out, made their way up over the rocks, and examined the footprints. They did not lead up toward the cabin, but instead they led along the shore around the bend.

"Follow him!" said Chet.

"Not yet," Frank advised. "I think we'd

better go up to the cabin first and find out what Joe knows about it. Perhaps he recognized the fellow and saw where he went."

They ploughed through the snow up to the top of the slope. They found Joe awaiting them in the door of the cabin.

"Did you see him?" shouted Frank.

"Just caught a glimpse of him," returned Joe, as the boys came running up to him. "I happened to look out the window and caught sight of somebody down among the rocks."

"Who was he?"

"I don't know. His back was turned to me, and he was crouching over. He was looking for that notebook, all right. I waited for a while, but I still couldn't get a good look at him, so I went and got the rifle. By the time I got back to the window he was gone."

"Before you fired the signal shot?"

"Yes. I could hardly believe my eyes. He just seemed to disappear into thin air. Well, I didn't lose any time firing the shot, I can tell you. I could see your boat away up the bay."

"The wind was against us," said Frank. "We tried to get here quickly, but we didn't have any luck."

"He's still on the island," said Joe quickly. "I'm pretty sure of that."

"Wonder how he got here," remarked Chet.

"There isn't any other ice-boat around, that we saw."

"Probably walked over from the mainland," Frank remarked. "Well, I guess we had better explore a bit and see if we can't get a sight of him. You're sure you didn't recognize him, Joe?"

"No. I couldn't say if the man was Hanleigh or not. I didn't get a good look at him at all."

"We'll get a good look at him," growled Biff. "And mighty soon, too."

"I suggest that two of us take the north side of the island and the other two take the south," said Joe.

Frank shook his head.

"Some one must stay here," he decided. "We don't want to run the risk of losing our supplies again. If this fellow managed to draw us far enough away from the cabin, there's no telling what damage he might do. Joe, I think you had better stay here. If you see the man coming this way, fire another shot, and we'll come a-running."

"Good idea!" approved Chet. "I think we all ought to separate. Each go in a different direction. If we catch sight of him, whistle!"

Frank quickly directed the search. Joe was to stay at the cabin, Chet was to go to the

northern side of the island, Biff was to explore the south. Frank himself was to cut through the trees in the center of the island, emerging on the other side.

They separated.

Frank ploughed through the snow, heading toward the heavy growth of trees at the top of Cabin Island. He soon reached a point from where he could get a good view of the entire island. He could see Biff and Chet industriously exploring the shore lines.

A little distance away, in the snow beneath the trees, he caught sight of a line of fresh footprints.

He picked up the trail at once, and followed the marks in the snow.

They led him in and out among the trees, then veered and seemed to be directed toward the rocks.

"What am I thinking of?" said Frank, to himself. "I'm not following the man's trail at all. I'm going back on it."

He turned, and retraced his steps, after a while reaching the place where he had first found the footprints. He went on from there, deeper into the thicket, proceeding cautiously.

At last he stood still for a moment, listening. Then he slipped in behind a tree.

He heard a crackle of branches. Some one

was moving about among the trees, only a few yards ahead.

Frank peeped out.

He saw a dark figure emerge from behind a clump of evergreens. The man stepped out, looked cautiously about, then moved up the slope in the direction of the cabin.

"Hanleigh!" said Frank, under his breath.

Frank Hardy's first impulse was to whistle, in order to bring the others to his assistance. Then he paused.

What did Hanleigh want? What did he plan to do?

## CHAPTER XVII

### The Escape

Frank was so close to the man that he recognized him readily. He knew now that Hanleigh was the man who had stolen their supplies and hidden them, evidently to get the boys to leave the island. He knew that Hanleigh was the man who had lost the mysterious Sparewell notebook. He wanted to know more. If he raised the alarm now, the man would simply refuse to talk.

Frank waited until the fellow had vanished among the trees. Then he turned and made his way toward the cabin by a short-cut. He wanted to reach the place first and warn Joe, so that they could better observe the man's actions without raising an immediate alarm.

"If he thinks we don't see him, he may give himself away," Frank reasoned.

He reached the cabin unobserved. Hanleigh had not yet emerged from the trees.

Frank found Joe standing at the window, looking down toward the rocks.

"I saw him! He's coming this way."

"Who is he?" demanded Joe eagerly.

"Hanleigh."

"I thought so all along. Is he coming here?"

"I think so. Look, Joe—here's my plan. I think he intends to come here. He imagines we're all out hunting for him. Let's hide and find out what he wants."

"How about Chet and Biff?"

"They're away down at the far ends of the island. We can capture Hanleigh any time we want."

"Where shall we hide?"

They looked around hastily. If Hanleigh came to the cabin, they knew the man would probably search the place high and low for the notebook which was his probable objective in returning to the island.

"We'll have to stay outside. No use running any risks. We'd better hide in the bushes until we see him come in here. Then we can creep up and watch him through the back window," Frank decided.

They left the cabin and ran across to a heavy clump of bushes only a few yards away. There they crouched, waiting.

For a while, nothing happened. Then they heard a snapping and crackling of branches far over to one side. In a few moments, Hanleigh came into view. He looked cautiously from side to side, then advanced swiftly toward the door of the cabin. There was a smile of satisfaction upon his swarthy face. It was

quite evident that he believed the lads had departed to search for him. Swiftly, he stepped into the cabin.

Frank and Joe came out of their hiding place. They sped quickly over to the window and peeped inside.

Hanleigh had paused uncertainly in the middle of the room. He was looking at the fireplace. He stepped toward it, then apparently changed his mind, for he paused, shook his head, and turned toward the kitchen. They heard him rummaging about there for a few minutes, and in a little while he returned.

That he was searching for something, soon became evident. He went over to the beds and flung blankets, pillows and even mattresses on the floor. With an expression of disgust, he began going through the boys' packsacks.

"If he's looking for the notebook he might as well quit now," whispered Frank.

"Where is it?"

"In my pocket."

Hanleigh made a thorough search of the cabin. He rummaged through the bureau and the desk, and as his search went on, with no success, he apparently lost his temper for he flung things on the floor and stamped angrily about.

"Let's rush him before he wrecks the cabin," whispered Joe.

But Frank restrained his brother.

"Wait!"

Hanleigh came over toward the window.

The boys ducked out of sight. They could hear the man talking to himself. They listened, and they heard him mutter:

"Well, they won't be able to read that cipher, anyway, so I guess it's all right."

Frank and Joe nudged one another. Hanleigh was certainly searching for the Sparewell notebook. The man went away from the window. They heard a crash as, in a fit of vicious temper, the man swept off a few of the little ornaments some one had placed above the fireplace.

"If he's going to start smashing things, I guess we'd better take a hand," remarked Frank.

The boys stole around the side of the cabin. Then they stepped suddenly across the threshold.

With an exclamation of surprise, Hanleigh swung around, facing them.

"Good day, Mr. Hanleigh," said Frank. "I see that you have decided to pay us a little call."

The man said nothing. He merely glared at the boys. They could see that he was estimating his chances of escape, but they barred the doorway.

"Why don't you wait until we're all at home?" asked Joe.

"You boys have no right here, anyway," growled the intruder.

"Did you ask Mr. Jefferson about it?" inquired Frank sweetly.

"I came back here to look for something I lost the other day."

"What other day? The day you came and stole all our supplies?"

"I don't know anything about your supplies. I mean the day I was here when you fellows first arrived."

"Haven't you been here since?"

"No."

"I'm pretty sure you have, Mr. Hanleigh. What was the idea of hiding our food supplies?"

"I don't know anything about your food supplies, I tell you!" shouted the man, in exasperation. "I haven't been here since the last time you saw me."

"Well, I suppose we'll have to take your word for it," said Frank, with a shrug. "Although I don't believe you for a minute. What was it you lost? Perhaps we can help you."

"My pocketbook," growled Hanleigh, after a moment's silence.

"Your pocketbook? Was there much money in it?"

"About fifty dollars. You don't blame me for coming back to look for it, do you?" sneered Hanleigh.

"Not at all. Where did you lose it?"

"I don't know. Somewhere on the island."

"Not down among the rocks, by chance?"

"I wasn't down there."

"Are you sure it wasn't a notebook?" asked Frank quietly.

The shot told. Hanleigh's fists clenched.

"No, it wasn't a notebook," he said thickly.

"Well, if it wasn't a notebook, I guess we can't help you. Quite sure, you didn't lose a notebook?"

"I don't know anything about a notebook."

"That's too bad. If it had been a notebook you lost, instead of a pocketbook, we'd be able to help you. We did find a notebook and we have been wondering whom it belonged to."

"What kind of notebook?"

"Why should you ask?" said Frank. "If you didn't lose one, you shouldn't be concerned. I think you'd better sit down, Mr. Hanleigh. We have a few things to talk over with you before we turn you over to the police."

Hanleigh went pale.

"The police?" he gasped.

"Why, of course. You don't suppose we're going to let you get away with this, do you? You have no right here, you are trespassing

on the island, you break into our cabin and go through all our belongings, just like a common burglar. What did you expect?"

"You won't turn me over to the police," declared Hanleigh.

"No?"

Hanleigh advanced toward them.

"Get out of my way!" he ordered.

The boys stood their ground.

"Just a minute," said Frank. "We have rifles here. If you try to make a getaway, we won't be afraid to shoot."

Hanleigh hesitated.

"That's just a bluff," he said weakly.

"Try it, and see."

"I'll try it!" roared Hanleigh.

He made a sudden lunge. Frank reached out to seize him and grabbed the man's arm. But Hanleigh shook himself free, plunged forward and collided with Joe. The boys were taken by surprise. Joe struggled desperately, but Hanleigh was a grown man and much stronger. He sent Joe reeling back against the wall.

Frank flung himself upon the man and tried to trip him up.

Hanleigh struck out viciously with his fist. It caught Frank full in the face. He was obliged to relinquish his hold. Before he knew it, Hanleigh had dashed toward the door. The

man leaped across the threshold and out into the snow.

Frank recovered himself quickly. He ran toward the wall and took down the little rifle. Joe, in the meantime, raced out of the cabin in pursuit of the fugitive.

"Stop, or I'll shoot!" Frank shouted.

But the man evidently realized that Frank would not make use of the rifle. He turned and shook his fist in their direction. With a yell of defiance, he disappeared among the trees.

Frank raised the rifle and fired two shots into the air. His aim was partly to frighten Hanleigh and partly to warn Chet and Biff.

Joe turned.

Pursuit was futile. The heavy snow hampered his footsteps.

"No use chasing him!" shouted Frank. "Perhaps Chet and Biff will catch him. It doesn't matter. We know that he is the fellow who had the notebook, and that's the main thing."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### The Cipher Solved

Hanleigh made good his escape.

Chet Morton and Biff Hooper, who were widely separated at the time, heard the rifle shots and returned posthaste to the cabin, but they did not meet the fugitive. By the time they reached the cabin, further pursuit was out of the question. Looking out the window, Frank pointed to a dark figure hastening across the ice toward the mainland.

"By the time we got one of the ice-boats out, he would be on the shore, and we'd never find him there," he said. "Let him go. We learned something, at any rate."

"What happened?" clamored Chet. "All we know is that Hanleigh was here. What did he do?"

Frank then told them of seeing Hanleigh among the trees, and of returning to the cabin to warn Joe.

"We watched him searching the place high and low. He was looking for the notebook—there's no doubt of that. As a matter of fact, we heard him say that it didn't really matter, because we wouldn't be able to solve the cipher,

anyway. So then Joe and I came in and asked him what he was doing. He tried to fool us with some cock-and-bull story about hunting for his pocketbook. He denied that he stole our supplies, but he was lying, of course. I threatened to turn him over to the police if he didn't tell us what he knew about the notebook, and I guess that frightened him for he made a dash for the door."

"We weren't ready for him," said Joe mournfully.

"I'll bet he thinks twice before he comes here again," declared Chet.

"I don't think we've seen the last of him," Frank remarked. "There is something mighty important about that notebook, and I'm sure he is not the man to give up as easily as all that."

Chet shook his head.

"He'll just wait until we leave the island for good."

"I don't think so. He knows that we're apt to stumble on the secret of that cipher at any time. I'm going to tackle that message again. It can't be so very difficult."

Frank immediately sat down at the desk, the cipher message before him, and began figuring on a pad of notepaper, while the other boys set about restoring the damage their visitor had created.

First of all, he set down all the letters of the

alphabet in order, and studied them intently with reference to the cipher.

"If I were writing a cipher," he mused. "How would I go about it? Perhaps this thing is really a lot simpler than it looks."

The easiest thing to do, he thought, would be merely to reverse the alphabet. Instead of the letter "a" he would use the letter "z." Instead of the letter "b" he would use "y," and so on.

With this in mind, he jotted down the alphabet backward, so that he had two rows of letters. Then he picked up the cipher again.

The first word was "XZYRM."

By replacing these letters with the corresponding letters in the other column he discovered that he had the word "CABIN."

Frank leaped to his feet with a shout of delight.

"I've got it!"

The others came running over to the desk.

"Have you solved it?" demanded Joe excitedly. "How did you do it? What does it say?"

"It's as simple as a-b-c. It was so easy that it looked hard. The man just turned the alphabet backward. Look! The first word is 'cabin.' "

"The rest of it! The rest of it!" exclaimed Biff.

"I haven't tackled the other words yet. Wait a minute. I'll have them in a jiffy."

Frank turned to the cipher again. For a few minutes he worked industriously. Little by little, the complete message took shape on the sheet of paper.

At last he sat back with a sigh of satisfaction.

"All serene! The cipher is solved."

"Read it."

Frank picked up the paper and read aloud:

CABIN ISLAND CHIMNEY LEFT FRONT NINE FEET HIGH.

Chet groaned with disappointment.

"And what good does that do?"

"What good does it do? Don't you understand? This message refers to the chimney right in this very cabin. All we have to do now is examine a part of the chimney on the left hand side, in front, nine feet from the floor."

The boys were immediately plunged into excitement. Everything else was forgotten. The chimney became the center of interest.

"Now we know why Hanleigh was measuring the chimney! Something is hidden there!" exclaimed Chet.

"Well, well!" said Joe approvingly. "And

you actually figured it out all by yourself."

"Nine feet high," mused Frank. "We'll have to get something to measure by."

A stick was obtained and the boys roughly estimated its length as being about three feet. Then Joe went over to the chimney. Measuring from the floor, he marked off its length three times until he reached a spot which he judged would be nine feet high.

"It doesn't look any different from any other part of the chimney," said Chet.

Frank got up on a chair and carefully examined the chimney stone at the place to which Joe had measured. He felt the mortar, tapped the stone, ran his hands over the surface, but he found nothing to indicate anything amiss.

"Solid rocks and mortar," he said, with disappointment. "All but those few cracks."

"That's queer," said Joe. "Why should the cipher mention that part of the chimney so particularly?"

"We're on the wrong track, for some reason or other." Frank repeated the cipher message again: " 'Cabin Island chimney left front nine feet high.' "

"I can't understand it," remarked Biff. "The message must mean *something.*"

Frank's face suddenly lighted up.

"Perhaps it means inside the chimney. If there is anything hidden, that would be the

logical place. It couldn't be from the outside, for we'd have to tear the whole chimney down to get at it."

"How are we going to get at it if it is hidden inside the chimney?" Chet inquired.

"One of us will just have to turn Santa Claus for a while."

"You mean, climb up nine feet into the chimney?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Somebody else can do it."

"Who volunteers?"

Biff and Joe regarded the chimney doubtfully.

"I'll bet there's a lot of soot in there," muttered Biff.

"Besides, there's a fire on."

"We'll put the fire out first, of course," Frank said. "Well, if nobody else wants to go, I'll do it."

"You will certainly need a bath when you come out," Chet told him.

"Listen." Biff seemed a trifle ashamed because of his reluctance to enter the chimney. "It's a sort of messy job, and Frank shouldn't have to do it just because the rest of us don't like the idea. Suppose we draw lots for it."

"That's fair enough," Joe agreed. "The fellow who draws the short straw goes up the chimney."

There were no straws available but the boys broke up some small sticks, leaving one considerably shorter than the others. Frank held the four sticks between the palms of his hands so that only the tops were visible. Biff drew first—one of the long sticks. Joe was next, and the drawing was abruptly terminated, for he held the short one.

"It's up to me, I guess," he said, with a grimace. "Oh, well. It won't be so bad. Perhaps I'll find a fortune in diamonds hidden inside that chimney."

"We'll all take turns at scrubbing you when you come out," Chet consoled him.

"We'll have to wait until the fire dies down, first of all."

Frank took the poker and broke up the burning log in the fireplace.

"In the meantime, you'd better get into some old clothes, Joe," he said.

While they waited for the fire to burn itself out, Joe changed into some garments found in a shed that were so old and disreputable that the soot would make no appreciable difference. Much as the boys wanted to learn the secret of the chimney, none of them envied Joe his task, and, to tell the truth, he regarded it with some misgivings himself.

At last the fire had burned so low that a dipperful of water quenched the embers, and

when the smoke had cleared away, Joe stepped into the big fireplace. He glanced up.

"Dark as a cellar!" he observed.

Chet came forward with his flashlight.

"I didn't think it would be useful so soon," he said, as he handed it over. "Away you go!"

Joe seized the flashlight and began his ascent into the chimney.

The stones were large and rough, affording a good foothold. No sooner had Joe begun his climb than a shower of soot descended into the fireplace. The lads heard a smothered gurgle.

"I'll bet that chimney hasn't been cleaned out since the cabin was built," said Biff.

"I'm sure of it!" gasped Joe, from inside. Then there was another gurgle and Joe said no more because he had received a mouthful of soot.

Those below could hear him scrambling about inside, and, by peering up into the fireplace, they could see the reflection of the flashlight. More soot continued to pour down the chimney. Joe was evidently having a bad time of it.

"Wonder what he'll find," speculated Biff.

"Soot," said Chet.

They waited. Then they heard a muffled cry of dismay.

"What's the matter?" they shouted.

"I'm stuck! I got up here, but now I can't get back." Joe evidently gave a violent lunge for freedom, because an unusually heavy shower of soot followed.

"Come on, fellows! Don't stand down there doing nothing!" he clamored. "Get me out of this before I smother!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### Disappointment

Frank Hardy sprang forward.

He crouched down in the fireplace and looked up. He could see Joe's wildly plunging feet a short distance above.

"Kick yourself free!" advised Chet helpfully.

"That's all I can do—kick!" replied the prisoner. "My elbows are wedged in against these rocks and I can't get loose."

"Hold steady a second," Frank said. "I'll try to drag you out."

He reached up and seized one of Joe's feet. He tugged, but Joe was evidently firmly wedged in the chimney.

"Keep on climbing and come out at the top," called Chet.

"Wait till I get you!" answered Joe. "This isn't funny."

"Come on, you chaps," said Frank, to the others. "Lend a hand. We'll just have to drag him out by main force."

Gingerly, Biff and Chet entered the fireplace. The three boys were crowded together. They reached up to grab Joe by the feet just

as the prisoner made another struggle and sent more soot pouring down on his rescuers. Within a few seconds, the three were liberally covered with the black substance.

"All together, now," said Frank, when they had grabbed Joe by the ankles. "Pull!"

They pulled.

With surprising quickness, Joe came loose. He came plunging down into the fireplace on top of the others, each of whom lost his balance and sat down heavily. There was more soot.

The four lads were piled in a heap in the fireplace, so blackened and dirty as to be unrecognizable. Joe, of course, had the worst of it. His face was as black as coal. He was a bedraggled, sooty object, but not much sorrier sight than his companions.

As they sat up and looked at one another, the humor of the situation suddenly struck them.

"Oh, boy! You chaps look funny!" yelled Chet, and burst into a howl of laughter.

"No funnier than you!" roared Biff. "You look like a chimney sweep."

They scrambled out of the fireplace, laughing in spite of themselves.

"If somebody could have seen us all when Joe came down out of that chimney!" laughed

Frank. "I'll bet we looked funny. What a glorious tumble!"

"I vote we all take a bath," said Chet mournfully.

"We certainly need it. And the fire is out and we have no hot water."

They looked glumly at each other, black and wretched, and then they began to laugh again.

"What did you find, Joe?"

"Soot!" returned the victim.

"We know you did. But what else did you find? Or didn't you have a chance to explore the chimney?"

"I explored it, all right. And I can tell you this—there's nothing hidden up there."

This announcement was a shock to them all.

"Didn't you find anything?" demanded Frank.

Joe shook his head.

"I turned on the flashlight and examined the inside of the chimney very carefully. The rocks and mortar are just as solid inside as they are on the outside. I didn't find a trace of anything unusual."

"You looked on the left hand side, at the front?"

"Exactly as the cipher said. And I tried to figure it out at about nine feet from the floor. Just to be sure, I examined every inch of the

chimney on that side. I was just going higher when I got stuck."

Even the grime could not hide the disappointment expressed in the boys' faces just then.

"I guess that message was just a fake," said Biff finally.

But the Hardy boys would not agree with this.

"If it is a fake, why was Hanleigh so frightened lest we would be able to read it?" asked Frank.

"Well," shrugged Biff, "if it isn't a fake, why isn't there something queer about that place in the chimney? We've examined it from the front, and Joe has examined it from the inside, and there is certainly nothing hidden there."

"I can't understand it," Frank admitted. "Just the same, I believe that message means something. It is certainly disappointing to find ourselves up against a blank wall just when we thought we were going to solve the whole mystery."

The boys lighted the fire again and after they had heated water they scrubbed themselves thoroughly and had a good cleaning-up. Within an hour they were presentable again, the soot had been swept up from the floor, and all evi-

dences of their adventure in the chimney had been removed.

"I wonder," suggested Joe, "if there is another Cabin Island."

"Not in Barmet Bay," said Frank.

"Perhaps somewhere else. Perhaps this message refers to an island in some other part of the country altogether. Perhaps Hanleigh merely guessed that this was the place."

"There may be something in that. It's just possible that Hanleigh is in the same boat as we are, and that we are all being fooled."

"Well," said Chet, "we've done the best we could, and there is something wrong somewhere, so why should we worry about it any longer? We came here for an outing—not to solve puzzles."

"That's right," declared Biff. "If this chap Hanleigh comes back we'll try to get the truth out of him, but we won't do ourselves any good by racking our brains over this business. Forget it!"

So the subject of the cipher message was officially dropped.

To Frank, however, their failure to discover anything of importance in the big chimney had been very disappointing. He had been elated by his success in solving the mystery of the cipher message and he had looked upon the en-

tire riddle as being near solution. The setback was a hard pill to swallow. In spite of the fact that Biff thought the message was a fake, Frank clung stubbornly to the belief that it was genuine and important.

"Hanleigh wouldn't have made such a fuss about it," he argued, "unless there was something important behind it all."

He regretted Hanleigh's escape now. Frank longed to meet the man again. He wanted another chance to force the fellow into an explanation of how he came to be in possession of Sparewell's notebook. And, above all, he wanted to know what the cipher message referred to. What was hidden in the chimney?

"We'll find out," he insisted. "Perhaps, in the long run, it will all turn out to be just as simple as that cipher."

He looked gloomily at the big chimney.

What mystery did it hide? Was there any mystery? Was the whole message just a hoax?

He could not believe this. In any case, Hanleigh knew something about the mysterious Sparewell—else how did he get possession of the notebook? And in this respect alone the mystery was worth following up.

That evening, the Hardy boys and their chums were gathered around the fire. Chet and Joe were playing checkers. Biff had rigged up the punching bag, had donned his

boxing gloves, and was making the bag drum in a lively manner. Frank was still studying the cipher, wondering if there might not be some little clue he had missed. Once in a while he referred to the pages of the notebook again.

It was growing colder outside and the boys had to keep a roaring fire in order that the cabin should be warm enough. The wind was rising and there were fitful slashes of snow against the windows.

"More dirty weather!" growled Biff, dealing a particularly vicious blow at the punching bag.

"Seems it's done nothing but snow since we came here," said Chet.

"It's your move," Joe reminded him.

Chet moved his checker and Joe promptly captured it, with a king as well.

The scene was peaceful. The boys would have been interested if they had known of what was happening in a little house in Bayport just then.

Hanleigh was preparing to return to Cabin Island.

## CHAPTER XX

### When Rogues Fall Out

Hanleigh, who had taken up his quarters in a small bungalow at the eastern limits of Bayport, had made an appointment for that evening with Tad Carson and Ike Nash, the two youths who had taken him to Cabin Island in their ice-boat on the occasion of his first meeting with the Hardy boys.

An alarm clock ticking on the kitchen table showed the hour as eight o'clock. Hanleigh, listening to the rising wind, made a gesture of impatience.

"What's the matter with them?" he growled. "Can't they ever get here when I tell them?"

He was obliged to wait another ten minutes before the door of the bungalow opened, and Ike Nash slouched in, followed by his companion.

They tossed their caps on the table and nodded coolly to Hanleigh.

"I thought I told you to be here at half-past seven!"

Tad Carson shrugged.

"That's the time you told us, all right. We just couldn't make it."

"Keep me cooling my heels while you shoot another game of pool, I suppose!" snapped the man.

"You haven't anything else to do," replied Nash. He sat down and put his feet on the table. "Well, what's it all about?"

"I want to go over to the island to-morrow."

"What island?" asked Tad Carson.

"What island do you think? *The* island, of course. Cabin Island. I want to go there early to-morrow morning."

"What's stopping you?" asked Nash insolently.

"Well, you know why I sent for you? I can't walk there."

The two youths glanced at one another.

"I suppose you want us to take you over in the ice-boat again, eh?"

"Of course. I want you to call here for me at seven o'clock in the morning. Have the ice-boat ready so we can make a quick start."

"You're giving orders to-night, ain't you, Hanleigh?" said Ike. "What if it doesn't suit us to go?"

"Why shouldn't it suit you? Neither of you is working."

"That's all right. Tad and I were just talking it over as we came up here to-night. We'd like to know more about this business, Han-

leigh. We have an idea there may be something crooked about it."

Hanleigh stared at them incredulously. That these allies should be inclined to back out had never entered his calculations.

"Crooked!" he exclaimed. "Of course not. I'm thinking of buying the island and naturally I want to look the place over before I make an offer."

"Yes? Why don't you wait until summer? The winter is no time of year to inspect an island."

Hanleigh became angry.

"Will you two mind your own business!" he blustered. "Is it any concern of yours why I want to go to the island. I pay you well for carrying me there, and all you have to do is keep your mouths shut."

"We won't keep 'em shut," remarked Nash, "unless we get more money than you have been giving us."

"I've been paying you very well, I think. Ten dollars each is very good money for a trip that most boys would be glad to take just for the fun of it."

"We don't run the ice-boat just for our health," said Carson. "Every time we go there we have to hang around and freeze until you are ready to come back. You won't even let us go up to the cabin with you. I'd like to

know what there is about that place that interests you so much."

Hanleigh gazed at them narrowly. So! They were beginning to suspect him!

"I've told you," he said irritably. "I may buy the place, and naturally I want to look the cabin over."

"Well, there wouldn't be any harm in letting us look it over too. Listen, Mr. Hanleigh—you're up to something, and we know it. If you don't want us to go to Mr. Jefferson and tell him about your visits to the island, you had better kick in with some more money." Tad Carson sat back and winked at his companion.

Hanleigh was almost speechless with wrath.

"Why—why—you young scoundrels!" he spluttered. "This is blackmail. Why, it's a hold-up!"

"Call it what you like!" sneered Nash.

"You can't tell Jefferson anything. I have his full permission to go to the island at any time I want."

"Is that so? Now, look here, Mr. Hanleigh—you've been trying to tell us that you may buy the island. Now, we happen to know that you made Mr. Jefferson an offer for the island and he told you he wouldn't sell at any price. How about that?"

"It's—it's false."

"It's the truth," said Nash.

"Who told you?" demanded Hanleigh.

"Never mind who told us. We know more about you than you think. Now, if you are up to any funny business, we won't put anything in your way, as long as you come through and treat us fair."

"I have treated you fairly. I have always paid you well."

"Ten dollars a trip," laughed Tad Carson. "That's all right if you were just going there to look the place over, as you told us. But you've got a bigger game on, and it will probably be worth a lot of money to you. We want to be in on it. If you're up to something crooked, we're running the risk of being arrested for helping you. We won't take a chance like that for ten dollars each."

"I've told you everything is perfectly fair and above-board," Hanleigh insisted. "Why should you try to hold me up? If I hear any more of this nonsense, I'll hire somebody else to take me to the island."

"Try it, and see what happens," said Nash darkly.

"What will happen?"

"We'll tell Jefferson."

"Tell him. I'm not afraid."

"That's a pretty good bluff, Mr. Hanleigh, but it won't work with us," said Carson. "You have some crooked game on, and you don't

want Jefferson to know about it. Why were you so anxious to buy the island? Why won't he sell it to you? That's what we'd like to know."

Hanleigh became more amicable.

"Now listen here, boys," he said smoothly; "it doesn't do any of us any good to quarrel like this. If you think you're not being paid enough, I guess I can let you have a little more. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll pay you each twenty dollars to take me to the island tomorrow morning. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

Nash laughed scornfully.

"Now we *know* you have some game on," he said. "Twenty dollars won't be enough. We want a hundred dollars apiece."

"A hundred! It's an outrage. I won't pay it."

Nash got up. "All right. Come on, Tad. We may as well go and see Mr. Jefferson now. He'll probably be glad to pay us well for the information we can give him."

The young men got up and were moving toward the door when Hanleigh sprang to his feet.

"Not so fast!" he begged. "Sit down and let us talk this over."

"What's the use of talking when you won't listen to reason?"

Hanleigh regarded the pair for a moment. Then he said:

"You are both very much mistaken. There is nothing crooked about my visits to the island. Still, I wouldn't want you to be running to Mr. Jefferson and bothering him with a silly story that would only cause a lot of trouble. Now, I've changed my mind about going to the island to-morrow. I'll go the day after to-morrow, instead."

"How about our hundred dollars?"

"It's an outrageous price. Fifty dollars——"

"No! A hundred or nothing."

Hanleigh sighed.

"I haven't got that much money with me. You boys seem to think I'm made of money."

"You were willing to spend a good fat sum to buy the island," Nash reminded him. "There's something fishy about the whole affair. Is there a gold mine on that island?"

Hanleigh laughed uneasily.

"You're worrying yourselves about something that doesn't concern you in the least. Give me a day to raise the money and you shall have it."

Nash glanced significantly at his chum.

"Now, you're talking sense," he said approvingly. "You pay us a hundred each and we'll take you there."

"The day after to-morrow."

"Just as you say. But we must have the money before we start."

"And you won't say anything to Jefferson?"

"Not a word. But if you don't come across with the money——"

"I'll pay it to you. Meet me here to-morrow night."

"All right." Nash and Carson went toward the door. "You've saved yourself a lot of trouble, Mr. Hanleigh."

They went away. No sooner had the door closed behind them than Hanleigh laughed sardonically.

"A hundred dollars!" he exclaimed. "The young pups! Thought they could make a fool out of me. Well, they'll have to get up in the middle of the night to get ahead of me. By the time they get wise to themselves I'll be at the island and back, and I won't pay for the privilege either."

Next morning, Hanleigh was up early. It was snowing heavily and there was a bitter wind, but he meant to go to Cabin Island that day. He knew where Tad Carson and Ike Nash kept their ice-boat and he made his way down to the little building unobserved.

The door was protected by a stout padlock, but Hanleigh picked up a heavy iron bar that stood against the side of the building and at-

tacked the lock. He smashed it with a single blow, opened the door, and went inside. He brought out the ice-boat and unfurled its sails.

There was snow on the ice, but the craft moved across the surface under the impetus of a strong wind. Hanleigh sat at the tiller. Within a few moments the boat was scudding down the bay. Hanleigh chuckled to himself as he thought of the way in which he had outwitted Ike Nash and Tad Carson.

The ice-boat sped on down the bay into the driving snow. The storm was increasing in fury. The wind hurtled the craft along at terrific speed. Hanleigh, although he had no experience in managing the boat, got along very well, and within a short time he saw the dark mass of Cabin Island looming out of the storm.

"A good day for it!" he chuckled. "I won't let those boys on the island make a monkey out of me as they did the last time."

## CHAPTER XXI

### A Cry for Help

When the Hardy boys and their chums awakened that morning they found that the storm of the night before had increased in fury to such an extent that the mainland was no longer visible.

The island was completely isolated. As far as the eye could reach, the boys could see nothing but swirling sheets of snow.

"Looks as if we'll have to stay indoors today," said Frank, as he lit the fire.

"A nuisance!" Chet grumbled. "I thought we could go out in the ice-boat this morning."

"We'd probably get lost out in that storm. It certainly is blowing up a fine blizzard!" Biff remarked.

Joe looked out the window.

"I wonder how our boats are faring," he said. "With a wind like that, they're liable to be damaged."

"I was thinking of that," Frank replied. "After breakfast we had better go down and see that they're all right."

The meal over, the boys donned their outdoor clothes and set out from the cabin. The snow

had drifted over the path and they were obliged to break a new trail down the slope toward the little cove in which the ice-boats were left.

"What a dirty day!" exclaimed Chet. "I think we're just as well off indoors in weather like this."

"I should say so," agreed the others.

They found that the ice-boats were weathering the gale well. No damage had been done, but the boys took all possible precautions in making the boats secure. While they were doing this, Joe gazed out into the storm.

"I must be dreaming," he said at last.

"Why?" asked Frank.

"It hardly seems possible, but I'm sure I saw an ice-boat go speeding past, out in the bay. It was just a shadow in the snow."

"What would an ice-boat be doing out here on a day like this?" scoffed Chet. "You certainly must have been dreaming."

The boys gazed out into the blinding wall of snow. They saw nothing, and they were just about to turn away, branding Joe's statement as a false alarm, when they heard a loud crash.

"What's that?"

The noise came from somewhere out in the storm, but it was so loud that the lads knew it had been caused by something not far from shore.

"There *is* something out there!" cried Joe.

"If it was an ice-boat it must have been wrecked," Frank declared. "I guess we had better investigate."

They went on down the shore a short distance, still gazing out into the driving snow, but there was no solution to the mystery. They could see nothing, and they heard nothing but the howl of the wind. Frank turned up his coat collar.

"I don't care to venture very far away from the island," he said doubtfully. "It would be mighty easy to get lost out there."

"I wonder what caused that crash!"

They were just about to give up the search when they heard a faint cry.

"Help! Help!"

It was a man's voice.

"That settles it," declared Frank. "There has been an accident out there and some one is hurt. He'll freeze to death if we leave him out there."

"We'll get him. Listen again, fellows, and see where the sound is coming from."

The cry was repeated. They judged that the man, whoever he was, was out in the blizzard, almost immediately in front of the place where they were now standing.

"Let's go," said Frank.

He took the lead, left the island, and plunged out into the snowy waste. The others followed.

Once beyond shelter of the island they caught the full force of the wind. It came howling down on them, flinging snow about them in clouds. They could scarcely see one another, so furious was the blizzard.

"Help!"

"We're coming!" shouted Frank.

In a few moments they could see a dark mass ahead.

"Ice-boat," grunted Joe. "I told you so. All smashed up."

The ice-boat lay on its side, its mast broken in two, its sails torn to ribbons, its understructure smashed. It had evidently been going at a good rate of speed and had overturned when it swung too far over in the wind. They could see the figure of a man pinned beneath the wreckage.

Hastily, the boys knelt down to extricate the victim. When Frank saw who the man was, he gave a shout of surprise.

"Hanleigh!"

"Get me out of here," snarled Hanleigh. "My leg is broken."

The lads wasted no time in dragging their enemy from beneath the wreckage of the ice-boat. He was groaning with pain.

"I can't walk!" he moaned. "You'll have to carry me. My leg is broken."

The boys raised Hanleigh on their shoulders.

There was no use trying to save the ice-boat. It was wrecked beyond all chance of repair.

"How did you come to be out here on a day like this?" demanded Frank, as they started the journey back to Cabin Island.

Hanleigh made no reply. He was moaning with pain. His right leg hung limply, but Frank's practiced eye saw at a glance that it was not broken.

"Sprained his ankle, most likely," he said to Joe.

"Lucky I wasn't killed," groaned Hanleigh. "I was going at terrific speed, and I couldn't get the boat stopped. I tried to lower sail and the wind turned the whole boat over on top of me."

"Anybody who goes ice-boating in a storm like this deserves whatever happens to him," observed Chet unsympathetically.

Hanleigh was a heavy man, and by the time the boys reached the island they were forced to stop and rest. Then, puffing from their labors, they raised the injured man to their shoulders again and began to climb up the slope.

"I'm glad you heard me shouting," muttered Hanleigh. "I would have frozen to death out there."

"A lucky chance for you that we heard you at all," Joe said. "If we had been up in the

cabin we would never have heard a whisper."

Frank nudged his brother.

"Lucky for us, too," he said. "Now we'll be able to make him talk."

At last they reached the cabin. They put Hanleigh on one of the beds, and then Frank examined the injured leg. As he had suspected, it was not broken, although the ankle was badly sprained. Having bathed it and put liniment and a bandage on the injured limb, Frank looked down at Hanleigh.

"You're all right. Don't make such a fuss. It's only a sprain."

"Lucky it wasn't worse. My, I'm glad you boys heard me calling."

"Pretty nice to have friends near at hand, isn't it?" said Frank. "Now that you're here, Hanleigh, I think you'd better tell us why you were snooping around the island in the first place."

"I wasn't coming to the island," returned Hanleigh lamely.

"As if we'll believe that!"

"Now, boys," said Hanleigh placatingly, "let's forget all our little differences and let bygones be bygones. You have saved my life and I'm very grateful to you. I didn't mean you any harm."

"Why were you coming here to-day?" insisted Frank.

"I'll tell you. After what happened the other day, I worried a lot. I was afraid you lads might think I was up to something crooked, and I wanted to make things square with you. So I decided to come here and make friends with you. And then I was going to look for that pocketbook I lost."

"Was that the only reason?"

"Absolutely the only reason."

"What interests you here so much?" asked Joe.

"I'm interested in the island because I want to buy it. There is no other reason beyond that."

"Why did you steal our supplies, then?"

"Now, boys," said Hanleigh, "what's the use of going into all that? I didn't take your supplies. I had nothing to do with it. I don't see why you should accuse me of a thing like that."

"Bluff!" said Frank. "Nothing but bluff! Your pocketbook story is a fairy tale. Well, Mr. Hanleigh, you're in a bad fix, you know. You won't be able to get back to town unless we take you there, and I'm warning you that unless you tell us the reason for your visits here, we intend to bring you in and turn you over to the police on a charge of trespass."

Hanleigh's eyes narrowed.

"You wouldn't do that?"

"Wouldn't we? You'd better tell us what you know."

"I don't know anything. You're just persecuting me. I merely came out here to make friends with you this morning and you won't give me a chance."

"We know you too well. What's it to be, Mr. Hanleigh—are you going to talk or are you going to jail?"

The victim groaned miserably.

"I don't see why you try to make everything so unpleasant for me," he complained. "You have me at your mercy and you're just taking an unfair advantage." He rubbed his sprained ankle tenderly. "I'm tired. I want to go to sleep."

"Perhaps after you've had a sleep, you'll think better of it."

Hanleigh shrugged. He removed his coat, folded it very carefully and placed it under his head.

"Do you want a pillow?" asked Chet.

"Hang your coat up on the wall," Frank suggested.

"No. No. I'm quite all right," returned Hanleigh hastily. "I'm quite comfortable as I am. I wish you boys would leave me alone. I want to sleep."

He placed his head on the folded coat.

The boys moved away.

"We can't pump him," whispered Frank. "Better leave him alone for a while."

With a great deal of groaning and muttering, Hanleigh composed himself for slumber. In a short while his heavy breathing told the boys that he was asleep.

## CHAPTER XXII

### The Letter

"Just like a clam, that fellow Hanleigh!" exclaimed Biff Hooper.

"He sure doesn't want to talk," Frank Hardy agreed. "I thought we could scare him, but I guess there's nothing doing."

"He didn't come back here to make friends with us. He was making another try at that notebook, that's what he was doing. It must be mighty important to him." Joe was eyeing the coat Hanleigh had folded so carefully and put under his head. "Wonder why he wouldn't take a pillow. He wasn't taking any chances on letting that coat get away from him."

The boys looked at one another significantly.

"Perhaps he has some important papers in the pocket," whispered Chet.

"Fine chance we have of getting at them."

"I don't know about that," said Frank. "Where there's a will, there's a way. Let him sleep a little longer and we'll see if we can't get at them."

The storm raged fiercely outside the cabin. The blizzard had grown in fury. The trees bowed before the bitter wind. The boys idled

about, waiting for the moment when they could attempt to secure the coat from beneath the head of their sleeping enemy.

At last Frank nodded.

Hanleigh was snoring. Frank went over to the wall and took down his own coat. He folded it carefully, then beckoned to Joe.

Together, the boys tiptoed over to the head of the bed.

While Joe held Frank's coat, Frank gently grasped the coat under Hanleigh's head and began to withdraw it.

The man stirred uneasily. His snoring ceased.

The boys stepped back.

Hanleigh turned over on his side. The coat was almost entirely free. The boys waited a few moments, then went toward the man again.

With a quick movement, Frank drew the coat from beneath his head, while at the same instant Joe slipped the other in its place. They stepped back.

Hanleigh groaned in his sleep, stirred again. His groping hand reached for the coat and he drew it closer to him. In a few moments his snoring again resounded through the cabin.

The boys retreated to the kitchen.

"I don't like the idea of going through a man's private papers," said Frank reluctantly; "but in this case I think there is some excuse.

Hanleigh is up to some crooked business here and it's our duty to find out what it is."

"That's right," agreed the others.

Frank felt the inside pocket of the coat. He encountered a bulky sheaf of papers and these he removed. Most of them were letters, but one in particular appeared to be a legal document.

He unfolded this document and brought it over to the window. The others crowded about him.

"Better keep an eye on Hanleigh, in case he awakes," Frank suggested. "Watch him, will you, Biff?"

Biff went over to the door.

"He's still asleep," he whispered.

"Good."

Frank read the document over to himself. Then he gave a low whistle of amazement.

"This clears up a lot of things," he said.

"Read it," whispered Joe anxiously.

Frank read the document. It was a letter addressed to Hanleigh and was from a lawyer in New York City. It was as follows:

"DEAR SIR:

"This is to advise you that your late uncle, John Sparewell, named you as sole heir in his will, which has just been probated. Under the provisions of the will you will benefit to the extent of all Mr. Sparewell's property, consisting of two lots of ground on

the outskirts of Bayport, cash in the bank amounting to three hundred and fifty dollars, and all personal papers and belongings. In his will, Mr. Sparewell made particular mention of a notebook which was to be given into your hands after his death, stressing its importance as containing information of great value. He also gave these instructions:

"'My nephew is to take this notebook, with the accompanying key to the cipher which I shall leave in a sealed envelope, and when he has made himself aware of the contents of the message I wish him to go to the place mentioned and procure the object referred to. This is to be returned to its rightful owner. In return for this favor, I name my nephew, George Hanleigh, as my sole heir.'

"We hereby take pleasure in forwarding to you the notebook and the sealed envelope mentioned by our deceased client and trust you will carry out his instructions to the letter.

"Yours very truly,
"FLINT AND FLINT, Attorneys at Law."

When Frank had concluded the reading of this document there were expressions of amazement from the other boys.

"So that's how he came to get the notebook!" said Chet. "John Sparewell was Hanleigh's uncle!"

"And Sparewell," observed Frank, "is dead."

"Well, that clears up so much of the mystery," said Joe. "But it looks as if Hanleigh is up against it just as much as we were. We

know the secret of the cipher message and it didn't do us any good."

"Perhaps he knows something else. Sparewell may have given him further instructions in that sealed envelope."

Frank looked through the other papers he had taken from Hanleigh's pocket. He was interrupted by a sudden whisper from Biff.

"Be careful!"

"What's the matter?"

"He's waking up."

Frank thrust the papers back into the coat pocket. There would be trouble when Hanleigh learned how he had been tricked. Then Biff sighed with relief.

"False alarm. He turned over again. He's still asleep."

Frank went back to the papers, relieved. He searched through them carefully. But he did not find what he sought. There were no further references to the cipher, to the sealed envelope, or to John Sparewell.

"Nothing else here," he reported finally.

"We'd better put the coat back under his head," Joe suggested.

Frank returned the papers to the pocket in which he had found them.

"We're liable to wake him up if we try to put the coat back now," he said. "I think we ought to wait until he has had his sleep. Then

the rest of you can keep him occupied while I slip the coat back where it belongs."

"And we'll ask him what he knows about Sparewell," said Chet.

"Oh, we'll have questions to ask him, never fear. He won't want us to go to Elroy Jefferson with the news about Sparewell."

Outside, the storm was at its height. They heard a distant crash.

One of the trees at the edge of the cliff had fallen before the force of the gale. The wind was sweeping across the island at terrific speed.

"If this keeps up, we'd better watch ourselves!" remarked Biff. "There are a couple of big trees right near the place. If they blow over, they're liable to wreck the cabin."

"Certainly is a wicked wind!" Frank agreed. "And it doesn't seem to be dying down, either."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth than there was a rending, crackling sound immediately above the cabin. Then, with a rush and a roar, something went sweeping past the window. At the same instant there came a grinding noise, followed by a thud and a crash on the roof.

"One of the trees blew down!" shouted Biff, in alarm.

"The chimney is going!" warned Joe.

Crash!

Another impact on the roof. There was a shower of mortar and fragments of stone in the fireplace.

"Back to the kitchen, fellows!" yelled Frank. "The chimney is falling in!"

## CHAPTER XXIII

### The Chimney Collapses

Frank Hardy ran over to the bed where Hanleigh was sleeping. The uproar on the roof had already aroused the man somewhat and he was stirring restlessly. Frank shook him.

"Get up!" he shouted. "The chimney is caving in!"

Hanleigh sat up quickly.

"What?" he demanded, rubbing his eyes.

"Get up! It's dangerous here. The storm blew down one of the trees and it struck the chimney!"

There was another crash. Stones and rocks went bumping and rolling down the roof, and more débris came tumbling into the fireplace.

Hanleigh needed no second urging. He sprang out of bed, then halted with a groan of pain.

"My ankle!" he said.

"I'll help you." Frank seized him by the arm, and Hanleigh hobbled out into the kitchen, where the others were gathered. The cabin was creaking and swaying in the violent wind. Every little while they could hear an additional

fragment of the chimney come crashing down onto the roof.

"Is the chimney coming down?" demanded Hanleigh eagerly.

They looked at him in surprise. Instead of being frightened, the man actually appeared glad of the mishap.

"If that other tree blows over and hits it, the chimney will be wrecked," said Frank sharply. "I can't see anything to look forward to in that."

Hanleigh was silent, but there was a look of undisguised elation in his swarthy face.

The wind was a hurricane by now.

Wilder and wilder it blew. The snow was so heavy that the boys could not see more than a few feet beyond the window. The chimney was no longer breaking up and the steady thump and clatter of rocks on the roof had ceased. The fireplace was half full of mortar and bits of stone.

"We'd better stay where we are," said Frank. "We're safe enough in the kitchen. If that chimney collapses it will mean trouble for any one in the outer room."

Hanleigh limped over to a chair and sat down.

"Might as well be comfortable," he muttered.

"Certainly," agreed Frank. He swung around to face the man. Then, quite calmly,

he said: "When did John Sparewell die?"

Hanleigh was taken completely off his guard by the sudden question.

"About eighteen months ago—" he began. Then he halted. "What do you know about John Sparewell?" he demanded.

"We know he was your uncle. And we know he disappeared from Elroy Jefferson's home with the rosewood box fifteen years ago. We know a lot more than you think, Hanleigh."

"You found that notebook!" shouted the man.

"Of course."

"You had no right to read it. The notebook was mine. I'll have the law on you for reading it."

"The law will be interested in that notebook, Hanleigh. You're none too anxious to let the police see it, or Mr. Jefferson either."

The shot told. Hanleigh's lips curved in a snarl.

"What if Jefferson does see the notebook? What do I care if you turn it over to him or to the police? It won't do any of you any good. The only important thing in the whole book is written in cipher, and I defy you to solve it!"

He sat back, triumphantly.

"We have solved it," Joe told him.

"What?"

Hanleigh started forward, his eyes staring.

"We solved the cipher."

Consternation was written on Hanleigh's face. He groaned.

"You didn't—you haven't found it?" he gasped.

"Found what?"

The man's eyes became cunning.

"Don't you know?"

Frank shook his head.

"We have found nothing, so far. I think you'd better tell us what you were looking for. What should we have found?"

Hanleigh sat back, sighing with relief.

"There is nothing," he said. "Not now."

"Why—have you found it already?"

He nodded.

"Yes. I found it several days ago. There is nothing for you boys to gain by looking further."

"Then why," asked Joe, "did you come back here to-day?"

Hanleigh licked his lips, and was silent.

"You're bluffing again, Hanleigh," said Frank. "If you had found what you were looking for, you wouldn't have kept coming back to the cabin. You found yourself up against the same problem that we did. We searched that chimney, high and low—and found nothing. Neither did you."

Hanleigh shrugged.

"I've talked too much. You won't get any more out of me. I wish I had kept my mouth shut."

"Just as you wish, Hanleigh," remarked Frank casually. "I think we're all in the same fix. You don't know any more than we do. But I warn you that we will keep an eye on you. If you do learn the secret of the chimney, you won't keep it."

Hanleigh laughed sneeringly.

"Then you'll wait a long time——"

He was interrupted by a startling sound.

The shrieking wind had proved too much for the second of the tall trees that towered above the cabin. It gave way before the gale. With an ominous crackling, with branches snapping like pistol shots, it began to fall. The boys could hear the gathering roar as the great tree plunged down toward the roof of the cabin.

Hanleigh leaped to his feet in fright, then sagged helplessly against the wall as his injured ankle refused to support his weight.

"We're done for!" he shouted, in terror. "The cabin is falling in!"

Crash!

The tree had struck the chimney. There was a deluge of stones on the roof. The boys cowered in the kitchen. If the roof gave, they might be seriously injured. Hanleigh, a picture of abject fright, crouched in the corner.

With a hideous roar, the chimney collapsed.

At the same time, the great tree went sweeping down past the side of the cabin. When it struck the chimney its downward course had been diverted.

The falling stones broke great holes in the roof of the cabin and came crashing down into the living room. A cloud of dust rose from the fireplace. A stone crashed to the floor, rebounded and smashed a pane of glass. It seemed as though the din would never end.

"Let's get out of here!" Hanleigh was babbling, white with fear. "Let's get out. We'll be killed! The whole place is coming down about our ears."

"We're all right!" snapped Frank. "Be quiet!"

Had any of them been in the living room they would probably have been seriously injured. The weight of the fallen chimney had broken in the roof and stones were still crashing through to the floor below. The fireplace was wrecked.

At last the uproar died away. Snow was sifting through the hole in the roof, and when Frank peeped through the doorway he could see the jagged fragments of the chimney rising above the gap.

"I guess it's all over now," he said calmly.

Chet restrained him.

"You're not going in there?" he said. "Frank, don't be foolish! You'll be killed!"

"There won't be any more falling stones. The rest of the chimney is pretty firm. I'm anxious to investigate. Where's that flashlight?"

"I'm coming, too," declared Joe, realizing Frank's motive. "This may be a lucky thing for all of us."

"Lucky?" groaned Biff. "Do you call it lucky to have the chimney fall in and wreck the place?"

"We'll see."

Frank picked up the flashlight. He looked out into the living room again. It was a scene of desolation. Great stones, and quantities of débris, dust, and mortar lay all about. Then, followed by Joe, he left the kitchen and picked his way among the rubbish over to the fireplace.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### The Discovery

"Do you think we'll find it, Frank?" asked Joe Hardy.

"I shouldn't be surprised. If there is anything hidden in that chimney, the banging-up it got just now should reveal it."

They peered into the fireplace. It was choked with rubbish.

"Better clear some of this away."

They began moving away the stones and rocks that blocked the entrance. Chet and Biff, after watching the Hardy boys for a few moments from the kitchen, came over to help. They forgot their fears in the eagerness of the search.

Once, while moving away a large stone, Frank dislodged some others that came down with a rush. He jumped back just in time.

"This business isn't safe yet," muttered Chet dubiously.

However, the boys went on with the work, and soon cleared out the fireplace, with no further mishap. Frank entered the opening and peered up.

"Clear daylight ahead!" he called.

The tall chimney having collapsed, he could see the white snow swirling just a few yards above. He switched on his flashlight and examined the interior.

Then he gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"It's all cracked and broken," he reported. "I'm going up."

"Be careful," advised Biff nervously.

But Frank was already scrambling up into the fireplace. The others waited. They jumped apprehensively when his struggling feet kicked loose some more stones that came plunging down into the rest of the débris.

For a while, there was silence.

Suddenly, there was a muffled shout from the chimney.

"I have it!" yelled Frank, in excitement. "It's here!"

The others heard him struggling for a moment; then came a further shower of stones and mortar.

"Got it!" shouted Frank triumphantly.

Then he came scrambling down into the fireplace again. His hands and face were black with soot, his clothes were ruined, but he bore in his hands an object that brought shouts of delight from the boys.

"The rosewood box!" declared Joe.

Frank nodded.

"Elroy Jefferson's stamp collection!"

The others crowded around him. Frank held the box up. It was a beautiful object, and although it had been hidden in the chimney for many years, its rosewood surface was almost as lustrous as on the day it was first concealed. Great excitement prevailed. The mystery of the chimney had been solved. The boys all talked at once. All clamored that the box be opened.

Frank undid the catch. They looked inside.

There, neatly arranged on sheets, were the rare stamps that had been Elroy Jefferson's pride—the stamps that were worth a fortune!

"Hurrah!" shouted Biff. Chet and Joe did a dance of joy. Frank closed the lid of the rosewood box.

"I found it right at the place mentioned in the cipher," he said. "We didn't discover it before, because the box had been hidden in a hollow right in the middle of one of the stones, and it had been mortared up when they were building the chimney. The shaking-up the chimney got a little while ago had broken the mortar and dislodged the stone. When I turned the flashlight on it I could plainly see the hollow and I knew something was hidden there. I dusted away the mortar, pried the stone up a little—and there was the box!"

A harsh voice interrupted him.

"What's that? You found it? Give it here! That box is mine!"

Hanleigh was standing in the kitchen doorway. His face was livid with rage.

"It belongs to Elroy Jefferson," returned Frank, "and we are going to return it to him."

Hanleigh tried to hobble over toward them, but his ankle gave him such pain that he abandoned the attempt and clung to the wall for support.

"I tell you, it's mine!" he screamed. "You have no right to take it! My uncle left that box to me in his will."

"He left it to you on condition that you return it to Mr. Jefferson, from whom he stole it," snapped Frank. "You haven't a chance to claim it, Hanleigh. We have the box and we intend to give it back to its owner."

Hanleigh glared at them. Then he shrugged.

"If only this ankle of mine was better, I'd show you!" he rasped. "It's downright robbery, that's what it is. I'll take this matter into the courts and make you give it up to me."

Frank laughed.

"You won't go into any court over this affair, Hanleigh. You know it would be the worse for you. We saw the letter you got from the lawyers, telling you that the box must be returned to Mr. Jefferson. Wait until we tell

our story. You'll be lucky if you aren't arrested. You never intended to live up to those instructions at all."

This threat frightened Hanleigh. His face was pale.

"I did," he whined. "I meant to give it back to Mr. Jefferson. Let me have the box, boys, and I'll see that he gets it."

"No chance! The box is a lot safer with us than it is with you. We found it and we're going to give it back. You'd better sit down, Hanleigh, and tell us all about it."

Hanleigh hesitated. Then he hobbled over to one of the beds and sat down.

"I guess the game is up," he admitted heavily.

"Tell us what you know about this affair, and we'll let the whole business drop, as far as you are concerned," Frank promised. "If you don't tell us we'll simply let the police take action—and you know what that will mean," he added significantly.

"Well," said Hanleigh, at last, "I suppose there is nothing else for me to do. With any luck at all, I might have had that box, and I would have been miles away by this time."

"How did it get here, in the first place?"

Hanleigh began his story.

"My uncle, John Sparewell," he said, "was a servant in the home of Elroy Jefferson for

many years. He was in financial difficulties at one time and when he learned about the valuable stamp collection he thought that if he stole it and sold it he might be able to realize enough money to pay off his debts. He knew that the collection was kept in a small safe in the house, so he watched his chance. He was highly trusted by Mr. Jefferson, so it was not long before he had the opportunity he was waiting for. The safe was left unlocked one afternoon, so my uncle slipped into the study, took the box, put on his hat and coat and left the house."

"And never went back," said Joe.

"He never returned. He had laid his plans very carefully, and he knew he might have to wait until the hue and cry died down before he would be able to dispose of the stamps, so he fled to a little village down on the sea-coast, and he stayed in hiding there for several months. He learned that the police were looking for him and then he found that a full description of the stamps had been circulated and that he would certainly be arrested if he ever tried to get rid of them to any recognized dealer. As a matter of fact, when he left the village where he had been hiding and went to New York, he narrowly escaped being arrested merely because he went to one of the dealers in that city and asked him what the stamps would be worth. The dealer became suspicious and

notified the police, but my uncle saw his danger in time and cleared out."

"And he never sold the stamps."

"He couldn't. It was too dangerous. He made up his mind to return them to Elroy Jefferson. So he took the rosewood box and came back to Bayport."

"Why didn't he return them?" asked Frank, in surprise.

"Mr. Jefferson was away. He had gone to Europe on one of his periodical collecting trips. Then my uncle was afraid he might be recognized around Bayport and he knew that if he were arrested and the stamps found on him, no one would believe that he had meant to give them back. So he determined to hide them until he would have a chance to see Mr. Jefferson. At this time, Cabin Island had been purchased, and the cabin was being built. One day, my uncle was prowling about the Jefferson place, wondering if he could steal into the house and return the box without being seen, when Mrs. Jefferson saw him. He did not know if he had been recognized, but he went away. A little while later, he saw her leave the house with the gardener, and he saw them looking for him. He became frightened, and he hired a boat and went out into the bay. But evidently they traced him, for in a little while, Mrs. Jef-

ferson and the gardener set out in their own boat."

Hanleigh looked gloomily at the floor.

"My uncle was afraid that they would turn him over to the police if they caught him with the rosewood box. He wanted to talk to Elroy Jefferson and have the charge against him withdrawn. So he decided to flee, but the only place he could think of just then was Cabin Island. So he went there in the boat. The cabin was just being built at this time, as I said, and the fireplace and chimney had not been finished. The masons had the chimney just about half completed. As it was a Sunday, the island was deserted that day. Fearing that he might be trapped on the island, with the box in his possession, he hid it in a hollow of one of the stones and covered it over with mortar, intending to come back for it later. Then he got away from the island before Mrs. Jefferson overtook him."

"Didn't he go back later?" asked Chet.

Hanleigh nodded. "He went back next day. But the masons were back at work, completing the chimney. He did not have a chance to get near the place. He remained hidden on the island all day until they went home that night. Then he went up to the cabin to recover the box. He found that more stones had been

placed over the stone where he had hidden the box. They had been securely mortared. The box was sealed up. In spite of all he could do, he could not get the box again. He came back to the island several times that week but he had no success. Every day, the masons did more work on the chimney, and every day his chances grew less. So he left Bayport and went to a little village in Maine, where he lived for a number of years. He did not try to get in touch with Elroy Jefferson again. Then, about five years ago, he determined to make another effort to recover the box and he came back, making several trips to the island, but although he tried to get at the box from inside the chimney, he failed. When he died, the box had not been recovered, although my uncle had repented bitterly of his foolish crime. In his will, he left his property to me and he also left a sealed letter containing the confession I have just told you."

"And he asked you to recover the box."

"Yes. But I wanted it for myself. I had become acquainted with a man who said he could dispose of it for me. He offered me fifty thousand dollars for the collection."

"Fifty thousand dollars!" exclaimed the boys.

"It is worth even more than that, for many of the stamps have increased in value since the

year they disappeared. I don't suppose Elroy Jefferson would sell it at any price. My uncle was dead, I was the only person who knew where the stamps were hidden, so I made up my mind to get them for myself. I came to the island, but I soon saw that the only way I could get at the box would be to wreck the chimney. I went to Elroy Jefferson and made him an offer for the cabin. I did not have the eight thousand dollars I offered him, but I thought that if he accepted, I could give him a small cash payment, occupy the island long enough to get possession of the stamps, and then I would clear out. But he wouldn't sell. So then I determined to get the stamps by hook or by crook——"

"Mostly crook!" interrupted Chet.

Hanleigh flashed him a glance of hatred.

"You boys spoiled my game!"

"We were almost ready to give up," Frank told him. "If you hadn't been so persistent we might have left the island and you might have got the stamps after all."

"I was afraid you would find them first," said Hanleigh. "When I lost that notebook, I was afraid you would solve the cipher and get the box before I had a chance. Well, I took a long chance, and I lost. That's the whole story. Now what are you going to do?"

He glared at them defiantly.

"First of all," Frank decided. "We are going to wait until this storm dies down. Then we are going to take you back to Bayport."

"Not to the police!" shouted Hanleigh, in terror.

"No—not to the police. I imagine Mr. Jefferson will be content with getting the stamps back. We promised not to turn you over to the police if you confessed, and we'll keep our promise. But you must get out of Bayport."

"I never want to see the place again," groaned Hanleigh.

"We are going to explain the whole affair to Mr. Jefferson and return the stamps to him. It will be a return for his kindness in letting us have the island for our outing."

"I guess our outing is finished," remarked Chet regretfully, with a glance at the ruined roof.

"We didn't have many more days to stay, anyway," consoled Frank. "And I'd rather get to the bottom of a mystery like this than have all the outings in the world."

"That's right," agreed his brother.

## CHAPTER XXV

### Elroy Jefferson Is Pleased

The storm died down early that afternoon, and the chums left the island and set out for Bayport, with the injured Hanleigh wrapped in blankets on one of the ice-boats. Hanleigh was completely beaten. When he got back to Bayport he managed to make his way to the railway station, caught the first train, and was never seen in the city again. It was fortunate for him that he left when he did. The Hardy boys made no report to the police, so he had nothing to fear from that quarter, but Tad Carson and Ike Nash, wrathful at the loss of their boat, were anxious to find their erstwhile employer.

The four chums went up to the Jefferson home together. They found Mr. Jefferson in the library, reading. He greeted them kindly.

"Well, boys," he said, "what brings you back from Cabin Island so soon? Haven't you been enjoying yourselves?"

"We've had a fine time, sir," said Frank, who acted as spokesman. "We came back because we found something there that might interest you."

"Something that might interest me?" asked Mr. Jefferson, puzzled. "I can't imagine what on earth it can be. Sit down and tell me all about it."

Frank produced the rosewood box.

"Do you recognize this, sir?"

Elroy Jefferson gazed at the box incredulously.

"My stamps!" he exclaimed. "My precious stamp collection!"

With trembling hands, he seized the box and opened it. When he saw that the stamps were undamaged, and exactly as he had last seen them, his joy knew no bounds.

"Tell me!" he demanded, in excitement. "Tell me where you found them? On the island?"

"We found them on Cabin Island," replied Frank, "hidden in the old chimney, among the stones. They have been there for years."

Elroy Jefferson was amazed.

"But how did you learn they were there? I never suspected for a moment. Why, I had given them up for lost. You can't imagine what this means to me, boys. That stamp collection is priceless. It was one of the tragedies of my life when the rosewood box was stolen."

Then the boys told him the full story of their adventures on Cabin Island, beginning with their first encounter with Hanleigh and con-

cluding with their discovery of the rosewood box after the chimney had been wrecked by the storm.

"I'm afraid the cabin is in a bit of a mess," said Frank; "but I don't think we'd have found the stamps at all if things had not happened the way they did."

"I am of course sorry about the cabin," said Mr. Jefferson. "But these stamps mean more to me than that. The cabin can be fixed up for a few dollars. So that was why Hanleigh was so anxious to buy the place! The rascal! John Sparewell's nephew! I always knew Sparewell had stolen the rosewood box but I never dreamed he had hidden it so near at hand."

The old gentleman's gratification was inspiring. The boys had known that he would be pleased at the return of his treasured stamp collection but they had not expected that it would give him the degree of pleasure which it evidently did. He gazed at the stamps constantly, held them up to the light, admired them, patted the boys on the back, and finally sat down at his desk.

"I can't do very much to express my appreciation," he said, "but I want you boys to accept a little reward. I have spent hundreds of dollars trying to get my collection back. I even engaged professional detectives, who failed. If

any one ever has need of a detective I'll certainly recommend the Hardy boys to him."

Frank laughed.

"We're not professionals, sir," he said. "We like tackling a good mystery, though."

"And you tackle them successfully. First, my automobile. Now, my stamps. Very few lads would have made good use of the slim clues you had."

He drew out his check book and wrote busily for a few minutes.

"As for a reward," put in Joe, "we didn't expect anything, Mr. Jefferson. It was fun. And, anyway, you've been awfully good to us, letting us have the cabin for our outing——"

"Nonsense!"

Mr. Jefferson swung around in his chair. He gave each of the Hardy boys a check. Then he wrote again for a few minutes and made a similar present to Biff and Chet.

"But this is for two hundred dollars!" exclaimed Frank, in amazement, as he looked at his check.

"And so is mine," said Joe.

"What of it?" said Mr. Jefferson. "My stamp collection is worth much more than that."

"But," stammered Chet, "I didn't do anything. The Hardy boys deserve any rewards you care to give them, but Biff and I didn't do

much. A hundred dollars, Mr. Jefferson—why, I can't take it!"

"Neither can I," added Biff, although he looked longingly at the check Mr. Jefferson had given him. "The Hardy boys deserve all the credit."

Mr. Jefferson quietly waved their objections aside.

"I realize they deserve most of the credit," he said, "because they did the detective work. But you lads helped a lot, too——"

"They certainly did!" Joe interpolated, with great earnestness.

"So you mustn't spoil my pleasure in having my stamps back by refusing what little reward I can give you."

"Gee!" said Chet, in delight. "I can do a lot of things with a hundred dollars! Isn't it great!"

"Furthermore," continued Elroy Jefferson, "I want you boys to understand that Cabin Island is at your disposal at any time. I'll have the cabin fixed up immediately so you can go there any time during the winter or summer."

Of course the Hardys did not know that before taking advantage of the offer they would have to solve "The Great Airport Mystery."

"Use the cabin," urged Jefferson.

Biff forgot himself.

"Hurrah!" he yelled. "Hurrah! You're a prince, Mr. Jefferson!"

The old gentleman beamed with pleasure.

"I can't think of any one I would rather have as my guests on Cabin Island," he said, "than the Hardy boys and their chums."

THE END

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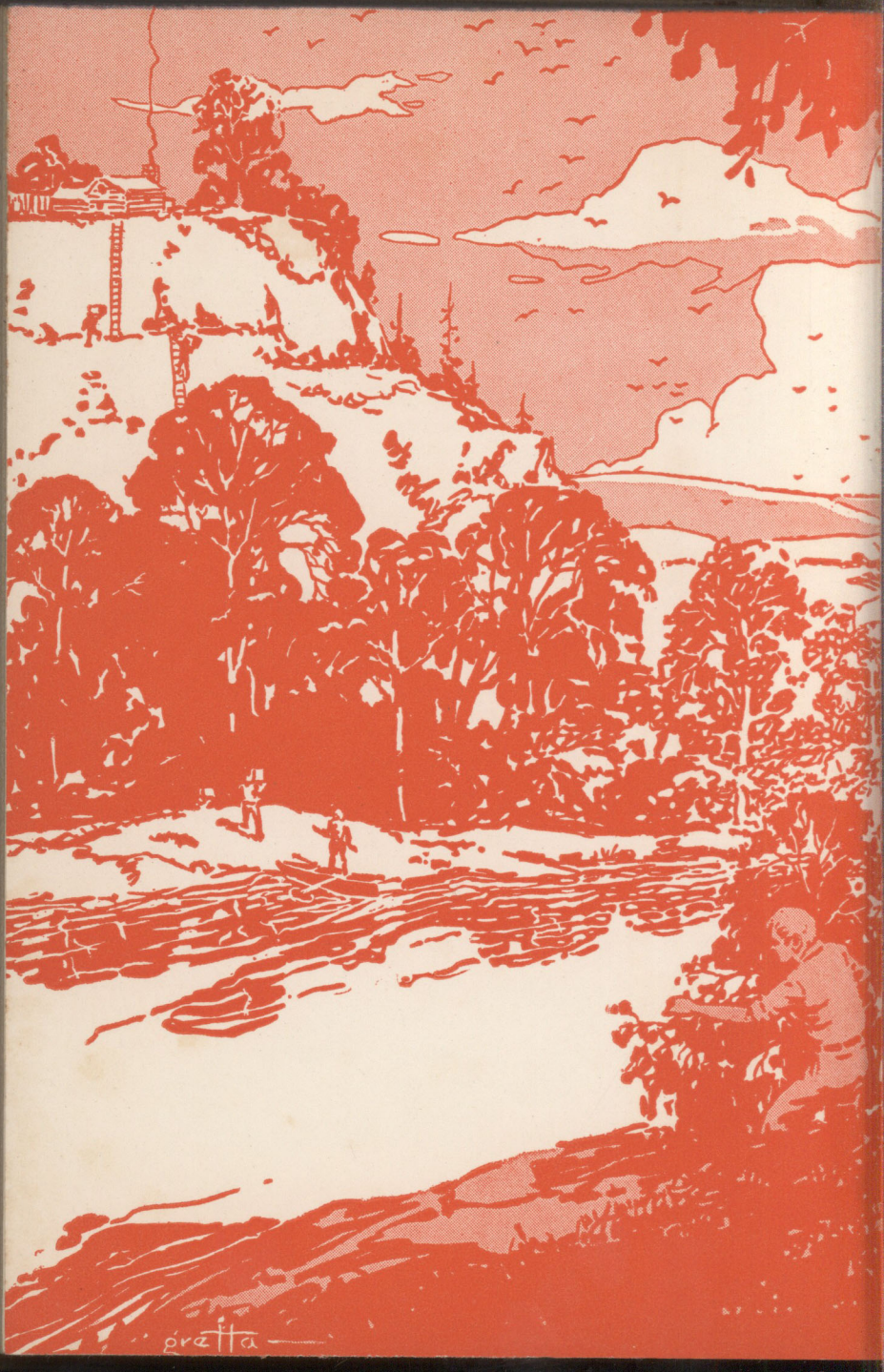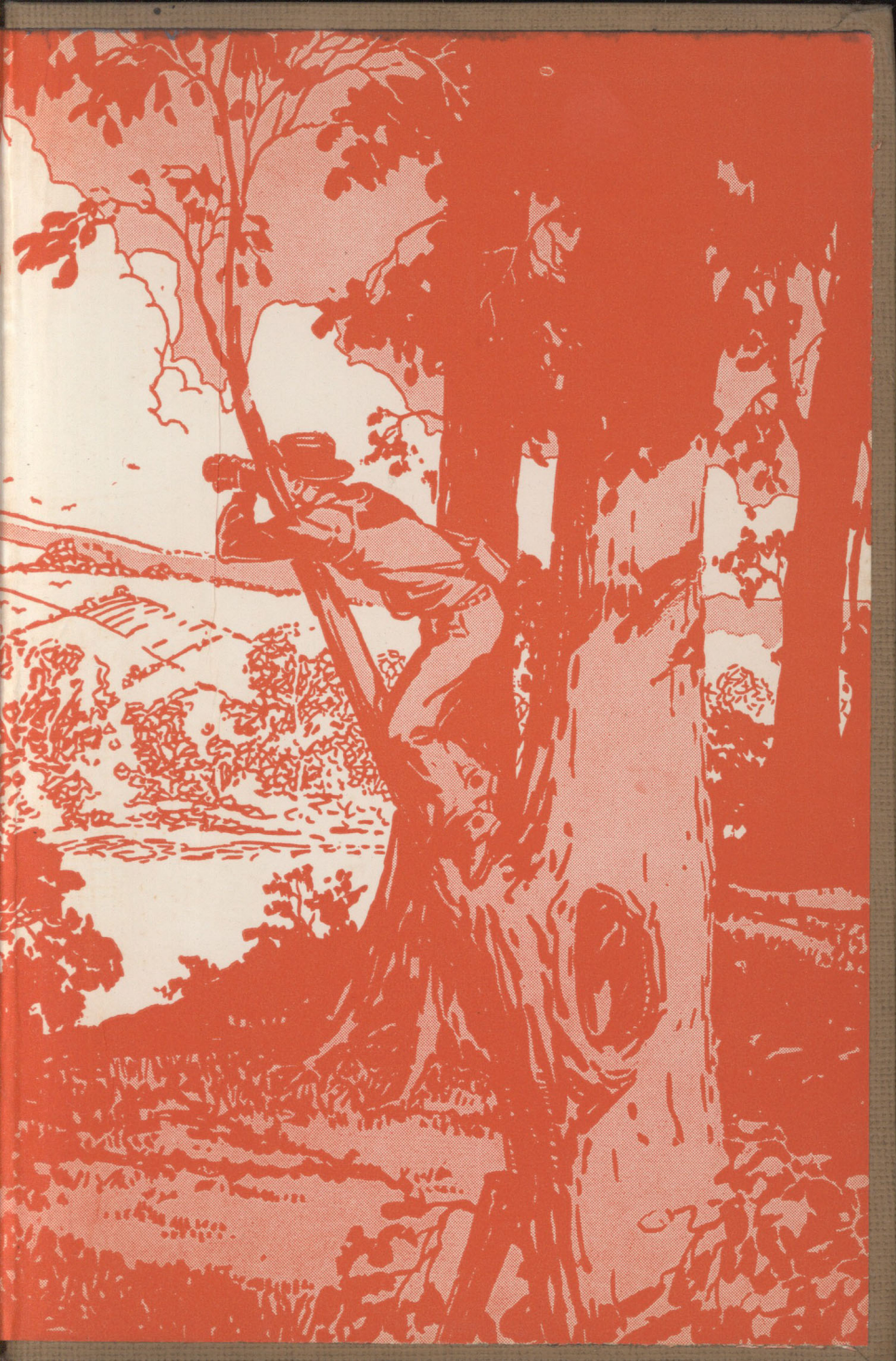
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